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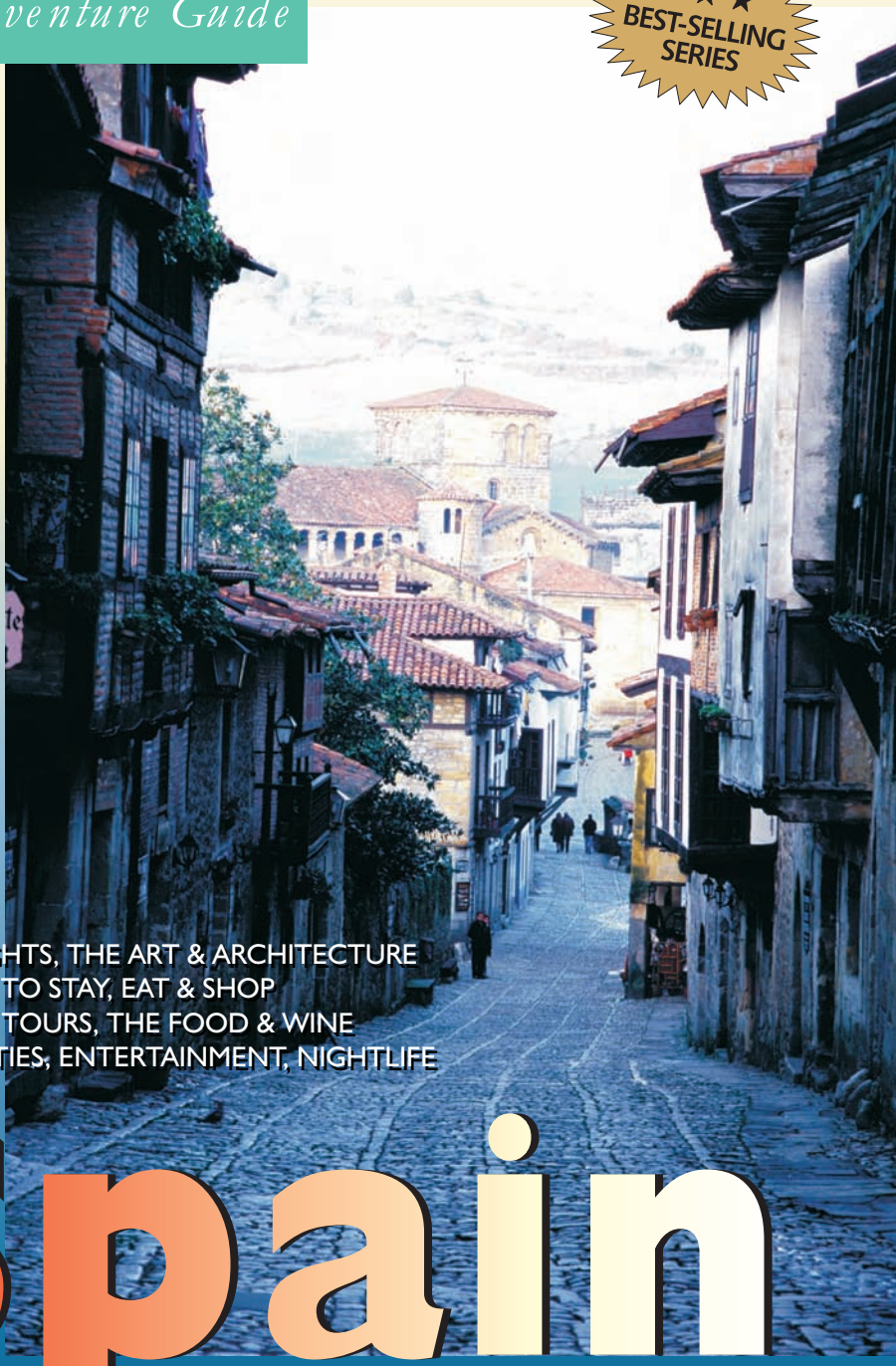

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Spain

Kelly Lipscomb

VISIT…

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Adventure Guide

Spain

Kelly Lipscomb

HUNTER

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Preface

"Sometimes the traveler feels completely transfixed by things he cannot explain." Camilo José Cela*, Journey to the Alcarrin*

A world of change occurs as the connection between a traveler and Spain becomes more intimate, as the initial feelings of exhilaration wane. Is this the point when the traveler knows he is finally at home in Spain, comfortable in his relationship with the country? It is, perhaps, just the beginning of a change in perceptions. For then the locked doors of Spain will begin to open up; instead of seeing just ancient walls with a story to them, there is also a family waiting behind those walls to tell its own stories. The traveler is then one step closer to realizing what George Orwell described as the "far off rumor of Spain that dwells in everyone's imagination."

The author, with a monk at the Monastery of Sobrado dox Monxes, founded 952 AD.

This peninsular country at the southwestern tip of Europe just north of Africa is all that has been said and written about it, the many cumulative experiences of the Romans, Moors, Gypsies and Catholics that have made it and the world what they are today. But there is more if the traveler begins to look more closely, between the squat doorways of Granada's Albaicín, beyond the battlement walls of Ávila, to see what else is there.

In reporting on the most fabled or inherently interesting Spanish cities and pueblos along with the outdoor adventures throughout the country, this book fills a vacancy on bookstore shelves. Somewhere between the city guides and the few books devoted to the natural spaces of Spain there is now a book inspired by both, intended to develop the idea that the time-honored tourist routes can complement the country's natural spaces and the adventures they offer. This book can't cover every single detail of the country. What book could? A little of Spain should be left to the imagination; what I saw you may not see and what I missed is left for you to discover.

The traveling and writing undertaken for this book were done with the thought that it is good to be different from the guidebook-toting travelers of the city; to be the one who moves not just with the crowds but away from them at times, to step off the beaten trail, be it to a village whose people haven't seen a foreigner for over a year, or to an outdoor space where a guidebook can be replaced by a surfboard, a parasail or an oar. But it is most rewarding to be both kinds of traveler. There is no law that says the traveler who follows obediently behind a tour guide cannot also be the first to jump off the bridge and stretch out the bungee cord toward the river far below. Without the beaten paths we might never have found that undisturbed village in Galicia, that empty surfing beach on the Costa de la Luz, the thermals off that Alpujarran peak or those rapids in northern Castilla y León. The Spanish culture that should not be missed is indelibly linked to the land of mountains,

rivers and coasts, olive trees and lemon groves, grapes, green forests and parched plains that gave rise to it. As the revered Spanish writer and intellectual Miguel de Unamuno observed, "there is no landscape without history." Furthermore, without the well-worn cobblestones of Granada's monumental Alhambra, Barcelona's Las Ramblas or Madrid's Plaza Mayor, we might never have come to Spain in the first place, and what a shame that would have been.

Kelly Lipscomb

About the Author

Kelly Lipscomb originally came to Spain as a backpacker and student of Spanish. After several years he moved from his home in Granada north to Barcelona, then began traveling through every region of the country – exploring the cities, the islands, and the wildest, most adventurous areas. His experiences in writing this book include stalking prehistoric dolmens across Extremadura, eating cow intestines in Toledo, climbing Mt. Teide in Tenerife and, most recently, hiking the 500-mile coastal route of the Camino de Santiago.

Dedication

In loving memory of Brian King, with whom I first discovered Spain.

Introduction

How To Use This Book

IN THIS CHAPTER

- How to Use This Book 1
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The Spanish government has done much of the work for me. Since the fall of dictatorship in the mid-1970s, Spain has been separated into 17 autonomous communities with broad powers of governing its individual provinces; all are under the central authority of Madrid, which concerns itself primarily with national issues such as currency and foreign relations. Most of these regions have, in fact, been geographically and, largely as a result, politically and culturally distinct from one another since the beginning of Iberian civilization. It was not my intention to inundate the reader with copious information about all the wrong places – for instance, the uninhabited island of Ceuta or Albacete, a city that was described to me by one of its own as "nothing but dusty streets and an ugly church." After a short visit, I concurred. Nor was it feasible to detail every minor hiking trail in the Picos de Europa when there are five major ones that history has decided are the best. Spain has much to offer and most travelers have limited time to experience it, which mandates that time be well spent.

It is a continually recurring pleasure to discover that, from a city like Granada or even Madrid, one can venture 30 minutes outside the urban wilderness and emerge in a truly wild space to ski or hike, or to enjoy an afternoon picnic in the mountains after a day of seeing the sights. The distinction between adventure and culture becomes blurred. In Spain they are often one and the same. Adventure is not just whitewater rafting, paragliding or mountain biking, but walking through a field of prehistoric stone dolmens, watching the birds fly in to roost in the Parque Nacional de Doñana, and running with the bulls, of course. This book offers the chance to experience both sides without getting lost along the same old tourist routes. Though it has yet to be scientifically proven, too much sightseeing must be bad for your health.

The first section of this book is devoted to the country as a whole. Understanding Spain before ever touching down at Madrid Barajas airport is the key to appreciating it once there. The logistics of traveling to Spain are spelled out in the second half of the introduction with information and advice on transportation, dining and accommodations, preparing for the outdoors and adventure sports, as well as words of caution. Each of the major festivals, national parks, adventure sports and a few preferred destinations are discussed.

Spain is such a rich country both culturally and ecologically that it can be overwhelming. In the regional chapters, I don't waste time on the outskirts of a city when signs for the Casco Antiguo point the way to its ancient medieval

core. Most of the sights are usually clustered in these areas and they serve as a great point from which to get oriented. In many cases the central square, or Plaza Mayor, is the locus of activity. Accommodations, restaurants and entertainment venues have been chosen so that you need only put on a pair of walking shoes to reach them, unless a certain distant establishment warrants mention. In most cases I've worked from the standpoint that if a place is not worth mentioning, why mention it? Above all, I've focused on the sights and sensations that are typically Spanish. While in Spain, why not be Spanish?

Geography

The **Iberian Peninsula**, of which Spain occupies roughly 85% and Portugal the remainder in the west, protrudes from the far southwestern tip of the Eurasian continent like a dislodged cornerstone. The peninsula has long served as a gateway between its neighboring regions. From the prehistory to the present day, distinct peoples have braved the imposing Pyrenees to cross south from Europe, while others have sailed across the Mediterranean from Africa or beyond to reach the peninsula and European mainland. The sheer, mountainous terrain, coupled with thousands of miles of coastal borders, undoubtedly hindered the steady advances and developments of man across the peninsula through the ages. Spain has been slow to change, but in the recent past has developed into a leading first-world country. If there is one constant through it all, it is that Spain has been a unique middle ground between Europe and Africa.

■ Highs & Lows

Mountainous regions and highlands predominate over lowlands in Spain. The average altitude is around 650 m (2,100 feet), making Spain the second highest country in Europe behind Switzerland, with the Pico de Teide in Tenerife its highest point at 3,719 m (12,200 feet). This rugged topography has played a major role in isolating Spain and its various inhabitants from the rest of Europe (and itself) through much of its history. In and around the barriers of the five major mountain chains are three lowland areas.

Lowlands: The lowland regions are largely comprised of the **Coastal Plains**, the **Andalucian Plain** in the southeast and the **Ebro Basin** in the northeast. Other minor, low-lying river valleys are located on the Río Tagus and the Río Guadiana near Portugal. The **Coastal Plains** are generally narrow strips running between the coastal mountain ranges and the seas. The Sierra Morena range and Sistema Peníbetico range define the **Andalucian Plain** between them. The **Ebro Basin** is formed by the Río Ebro valley and contained by mountains on three sides.

La Meseta: Occupying 40% of the country at its heart, La Meseta is a vast plateau notable for its endless vistas and desolate landscapes. One of the least populated of Spain's regions, it encompasses much of Castilla y Leon, Castilla-LaMancha and Extremadura, as well as the Madrid community. Due to sparse rainfall, much of this land is infertile, although pastures can be found in parts of Extremadura and vineyards farther south. Grains such as wheat are the staple crop here. The **Cordillera Central** mountain chain runs like a scar across the middle of the Meseta from the Portuguese border to just northeast of Madrid. Erratic mountain outcroppings hem it in on all sides save for the western border with Portugal.

Mountains surrounding La Meseta: Less imposing than the mountains along Spain's outer regions, mountain ranges shelter La Meseta from the perimeter regions of Spain. They generally become increasingly rugged to the south. In the north, the **Montes de León** and **Cordillera Cantabrica** cordon off the rich Galician plateau, Asturias and Cantabria. The **Sistema Ibérico** and **Serranía de Cuenca** form the eastern edge of La Meseta, while the **Sierra Morena** delineates the southern edge, encompassing the **Montes de Toledo** north of it.

Mountains on the periphery of La Meseta: These are the grandest of Spain's mountain ranges, and arguably the best suited for adventure sports. In the far northwest, the long, unbroken **Pyrenees Mountains** run from the Mediterranean Sea to the Bay of Biscay across Cataluña, Aragón and Navarra. Its six highest peaks reach toward the heavens at over 3,000 m (9,800 feet), with **Lardana** the tallest at 3,375 m (11,070 feet). The Andalucian range **Cordillera Bética** runs along the southeast of Spain from its origin in the Mediterranean Balearics. Most noteworthy are the mountains of the **Sierra Nevada** near Granada, which include Spain's highest mainland peak, the **Mulhacén** (3,478 m/11,408 feet).

■ Rivers

> *"Way off we saw the steep bluffs, dark with trees and jutting with gray stone, that marked the course of the Irati River."* Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

The nine major rivers in Spain drain into the Atlantic and Mediterranean, though even those regarded as "main" have modest flows owing to the fact that they drain only rainwater. Smaller mountain rivers in the north have shorter courses due to their proximity to the sea and include the **Bidasoa**, **Nervion**, **Sella**, **Nalon** and **Navia**. The **Duero**, **Mino**, **Tajo** and **Guadiana** rivers rise in the Sistema Iberico and cut deep, rocky courses through mountain valleys en route to Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean. Coursing the south, the **Guadalquivir River** creates a fertile plain toward the Atlantic. It is the deepest of Spain's rivers and, besides the Ebro in the northeast, the only other intermittently navigable one. The **Ebro River** is the largest river in volume, rising in the Cordillera Cantabria and ultimately spilling in the Mediterranean to the east, along with the **Segura**, **Jucar** and **Turia** rivers.

■ Oceans & Coasts

Mountain ranges parallel much of the Spanish coast, creating generally straight coastlines with few inlets. The one exception is Galicia, situated on a plateau in the northwest. Spain has over 2,000 beaches. Many are ideal, though often swamped by British and German tourists during the summer months. There are, however, some spectacular, empty beaches, such as **Cabo de Gata** on east of Andalucía's Costa del Sol, parts of which are enticingly unreachable by modern transportation, and areas of the **Costa de la Luz** on the Atlantic. The coastal plains are narrow (rarely wider than 30 km/19 miles), and broken by mountains that descend to the sea. As a result, Spain has few accommodating harbors outside of Cataluña's and those of the Galician Coast.

Atlantic Coast: Along the Atlantic in the northeast of Spain the water is colder and the weather less dependable than that of the Mediterranean.

Here you will find the most rustic of Spanish coasts along the Galicia Province and its fjords **Rías Bajas** and **Rías Altas**. To the east, along the **Bay of Biscay** and shadowed by the Cordillera Cantabrica are gentler beaches of the **Costa Cantabrica** and great surfing opportunities approaching San Sebastián. The **Costa de la Luz** in the southwest is sheltered by pinewoods, and its beaches stretch west from Gibraltar to the Portuguese border.

Mediterranean Coast: The Mediterranean coastline begins east of the Costa de la Luz in Andalucía and continues all the way up the east coast to France. In the south is the **Costa del Sol**. Among its attractions are the romantic beach outcroppings of Nerja, the ritzy beach town of Marbella and, of course, the 50-km (31-mile) expanse of the **Cabo de Gata**, where desert and mountains give way to some of the south's prettiest water. Its provinces include Cádiz, Málaga and Granada. The mild climate here produces scant rainfall and a semitropical vegetation of palm-trees, cypresses, oleanders and hibiscus.

Along the southeastern Mediterranean Coast is the Almería Province and **Costa Almería**. It includes long beaches with small coves, desert areas and high mountains with extensive plains. The **Costa Calida** of Murcia offers the popular, warm waters of the **Mar Menor**, **Aguilas** and **Mazarron**. In many places, the mountains extend right to the sea, strewn with prickly pears, oleander and wild palmetto.

The **Costa Blanca**, or White Coast, corresponds with Alicante and can be divided into two scenic sections, the jagged, mountainous coastlines of the north, and a vast plain of sand, salt deposits and palm trees in the south. North of here, the **Costa del Azahar** claims the upper reaches of the Community of Valencia. In contrast to the mountainous terrain of this province, the coastline is an endless swath of greenery and orange plantations.

The **Costa Dorada**, the Golden Coast, acquired its name because of the intense sun over its fine sandy beaches. Occupying the southern realm of the Cataluña Province, it is famed for its picturesque beaches and stable climate year-round. The **Costa Brava** in northern Catalonia is the farthest northeastern Spanish coast. Passing by the city of Barcelona, the Costa Brava has rich vegetation merging with the sea and cliffs amid sandy beaches and mild weather good most of the year.

■ Islands

Once called the "Happy Islands" by the Greeks and Romans, the inviting atmosphere of the **Canary Islands** is a pleasing blend of North African and Western European influences. These islands in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Africa became part of the Spanish kingdom in 1496. The larger islands, **Gran Canaria**, **Fuerteventura**, **Lazarote**, **Tenerife**, **La Palma**, **Gomera** and Hierra, and the smaller islands, Alegranza, Graciosa, Montana Clara, **Roque del Este**, **Roque del Oeste** and **Lobos**, all display radically different characteristics. Surf sports are great in Gran Canaria and Tenerife (where the hiking is out of this world on its lunar-like El Teide National Park). Some historians believe these islands to be remnants of the legendary continent Atlantis. It is proven, though, that Christopher Columbus stopped here en route to discover the New World.

With some 300 sunny days per year, it's little wonder there are more passengers at the airport of Palma de Mallorca than at any other Spanish city. The

Balearic Islands, islands known alternately for isolated beach coves, party scenes, high prices and prehistoric relics – are located off Spain's east coast in the Mediterranean Sea. They are comprised of Gimnesis (Mallorca, Menorca and Cabrera) in the north, and Pitusas (Ibiza and Formentera) to the southwest. The three most popular islands for tourists – **Mallorca**, **Menorca** and **Ibiza** – vary greatly from one another in geography and atmosphere. Mallorca has a magnificent coastline consisting of rocky outcroppings and tiny coves offering pristine sand beaches. Menorca's scene is tranquil and less crowded, and Ibiza's is just plain out of control. Formentera and Cabrera remain extremely isolated in contrast.

■ Environment

Ecology

> *ECO-TOURISM, n., 1. travel and tourism that aids in the conservation of the environment, indigenous populations, traditions and local economy either through education or action. Syn. GREEN TOURISM, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM.*

With the reemergence of democracy beginning in the late 1970s, Spain's awareness and interest in ecological concerns has steadily, if belatedly, increased. While it cannot be said that Spaniards have altogether discontinued their harmful industrial and agricultural practices (dumping waste haphazardly, over-using pesticides and artificial fertilizers and water, deforesting), measures have been enacted to – at least on paper – counter the devastating side-effects of these activities. A skeptic would point out the obvious, that Spain was once a great forest with clean air, inland and coastal waters and a secure wildlife. A leathery mariner from Barcelona once described to me a ferry trip he made from Cádiz to the Canary Islands during the 1950s. As he and his shipmates sat on the deck the first afternoon playing cards, they spotted what they initially thought to be the hull of an upturned ship. Upon closer inspection individual forms began to materialize, each reflecting the sun in silvery bursts like a prism. It was not a ship's hull, they realized, but a sea of dolphins, a pod that numbered three or four hundred. On a recent trip to Morocco, I was delighted to see three dolphins swimming alongside the ferry.

Inland, many of Spain's most indelible species face a far more precarious situation. Still Spain maintains more wild spaces, more mountains and forests, and arguably more bio-diversity than anywhere else in Europe. From the high Pyrenees to desert stretches of the lower Mediterranean to the Ebro Delta, the country is marked with a rich and varied eco-system. The chance to preserve it all has not yet slipped completely out of reach.

Spain's notable absence during the Industrial Revolution may have spared its natural spaces early on, but the same recalcitrance that left it lagging behind much of Western Europe in economic terms has meant that pressing environmental issues took a back seat during its late economic thrust to catch up. Under Franco, Spain experienced its headiest and most telling years of industrialization and development. Through the 20th century an outmoded industrial system that lacked effective regulations for pollution wreaked havoc on the country; while the environmental outlook changed dramatically

and negatively during a short period of time, reversing the processes set in motion during Franco's days and in previously industrialized areas is proving to be a much slower, tedious and often ineffective program. Until recently, companies were allowed to dump toxic waste from freighters just miles off the Atlantic coast. The Mediterranean is in the throes of recovering from years of raw sewage and effluent pollution from offshore oil and gas production. Mining accidents and a string of oil spills over the past quarter-century, including the most recent when the *Prestige* split in two off the Galician coast in 2002, have devastated rivers and marine life. Bilbao, Spain's leading industrial center well into the 1990s, was credited (or discredited) with Western Europe's worst air quality – despite the fact that Spain and the rest of southwestern Europe enjoy a natural advantage over the north in the prevailing winds that act to keep air pollution to a minimum. And leaded gasoline wasn't phased out until the 1990s, meaning that major urban centers like Madrid and Barcelona continue to suffer under a polluted skyline.

In a departure from its historically shortsighted policies, the government established a **Ministry of the Environment** in an effort to improve conditions. A series of acts introduced in the 1990s have begun to target the major environmental issues and since 1976 membership in environmental organizations has increased dramatically, indicating a growing change among the population. But it's a long, dirty road. Aforestation has introduced non-native species such as the eucalyptus tree, which grows rapidly, choking out native species. Water quantity has decreased as agricultural practices expand, fostering desertification (Spain, in fact, has Europe's only bona-fide desert, located in the Almería province) while air and noise pollution have steadily increased.

Flora

"The India of Europe!" proclaimed the botanist Linnaeus. The sheer diversity of habitats in Spain, a country no larger than the state of Texas, is surprising. Distinctive landscapes throughout the country harbor over 8,000 floral species. More than half of these are endemic to the peninsula, the result of the shielding effect the Pyrenees Mountains had when the last ice age receded. The peninsula is part of the geographical zone known as the Western Palearctic, encompassing native European, North African, even arctic vegetation in the highest mountain regions, the resulting mix of which is occasionally spectacular – African palms alongside Mediterranean oaks; European beech trees with Aleppo pines.

The Spanish government has taken measures during the last century to shield its most important natural areas. The ecologically conscious King Alfonso VIII established Spain's first National Park of Covadonga in the Cordillera Cantabrica mountains. Since then, wetlands, forests and highlands crucial to mammals, migratory birds and insects have been protected. The chamois, a goat-like antelope on the verge of extinction at the turn of the 20th century, has rebounded and now roams the mountains south of Ávila in great numbers since King Alfonso VIII set that area aside as a natural park.

Dry Spain: The central and southern regions of Spain foster two types of vegetation in the Meseta plateau/Iberian depression and along the Mediterranean. In the driest areas, namely Extremadura, La Mancha and the Ebro

Valley, **steppe flora** is common, including thorny scrub, plants and woodlands able to retain moisture in the dry, salty environment. The Meseta sprouts holm oaks to the west and cork trees to the east. A more complex botanical environment exists along the Mediterranean coastal zones, where holm oak and cork forests are interspersed with cedars and coniferous trees like the Aleppo pine. These give way to conifers such as Scotts pine and larch in the mountainous regions. The central sierras of the Meseta have beech and oak, the Sierra Nevada oak, chestnut, and the occasional Spanish fir (a conifer of North African origin). An almost treeless landscape of scrub thrives in the highest altitudes, while the eastern Mediterranean deserts exhibit exotic species of plants such as aloe, the Indian prickly pear and dwarf palms.

Wet Spain: The north, from País Vasco to Galicia, is a land of forests where oak and beech thrive in the damp, maritime regions. Here the rugged land often produces permanently green fields, deciduous shrubs and trees. Ferns, gorse and heather dominate the rich undergrowth while holm oaks thrive out in the open and in shady foothills. Higher up, there are beech and chestnuts and various spruce species added through reforestation. The uppermost reaches spawn alpine meadows and scrublands.

Coastlines & Wetlands: The Spanish coastline has many habitats, each increasingly threatened by pollution and waste spills, ineffective irrigation practices and resort development. The wetlands, the most valuable wildlife habitat of the Spanish coast and its most fragile, are faced with all of these issues and a decreasing water table is just one of the effects. In Doñana on the southern coast in the Huelva province, the water table is said to be falling as much as one meter (three feet) per year. As these habitats dry up, the plants that have long since adapted to the salty waters are dying out and the birds – millions in the case of Doñana each year – are forced to move on or stay and die. Preserving these wetlands is crucial in preserving Spain's biodiversity. Doñana is a refuge for the endangered lynx and imperial eagle, as well as hundreds of other flyers. The Ebro Delta in Cataluña harbors over 300 species. La Albufera de Valencia has been reduced by rice fields to a quarter of its original size and has become less and less viable as a wintering ground for geese. The salt flats of Santa Pola and Torrejieja in Alicante continue to attract flamingos, but the National Park of Tablas de Daimiel in La Mancha, an inland marshland, has begun to dry up frequently. Each of these areas has come under some measure of protection by the Spanish government; preserving them, however, is going to require a much more vigorous approach.

Forests: Spain has both deciduous and coniferous forests. In the mountains of northern Spain where rainfall is high, the broad-leaf deciduous forests predominate. Beech is the most common tree and this is the habitat of the rare brown bear, though strands of poplar and Pyrenean oak are not uncommon. These forests are home to a variety of birds, including sparrow hawks, buzzards, kestrels, golden orioles, nightingales, tawny owls and turtle doves. Coniferous forests are more widespread, located generally on subalpine mountain slopes. These consist of pine varieties including the Aleppo, umbrella, black and Scotts varieties. Roe, red and fallow deer are common, as are wild boar, squirrels, the capercaillie and a variety of woodpeckers. Silver fir grows in Spain's northeastern mountains.

Scrubland: Spain is full of scrublands, the result of forests that were felled long ago. The type of scrubland is dependent on the climatic conditions. The natural park of Monfragüe in Extremadura exhibits extensive Mediterranean scrubland beneath its olive trees, holm oaks and cork oaks, which includes heather, cistus species, laburnum, rosemary and lavender. These scrublands harbor the endangered lynx, black vulture and Spanish imperial eagle and all manner of smaller animals such as the rabbit, hare and fox. Other scrublands are located in the game reserve of Cíjara in southern Extremadura and in the Monte de El Pardo near Madrid, both known refuges of the Spanish imperial eagle.

Plains: Flatlands predominate on the Iberian Peninsula as a result of the vast central plateau, La Meseta. The greater expanse of this plateau is arid and dependent on irrigation of subterranean water supplies, which are quickly being depleted. In the south, the Dehesa, with its fertile pasturelands and evergreen strands, is a unique habitat to Spain and home to threatened species such as the black-winged kite and the Spanish imperial eagle, as well as numerous smaller flyers. Arid, stepped plains characterize the province of Almería in its Tabernas Desert and much of the Río Ebro valley. Here, rainfall is under 30 cm (12 inches) per year and the sun is usually high and hot. Erosion is a constant concern, having shaped puckered gullies and dirt spires in a landscape that is threatened with severe run-off when it does rain once in a blue moon. The dry conditions are conducive to the growth of various grasses, populated by sand grouse, quail, stone curlew and great bustards. In the Sierra Alhamilla erosion has created enormous chalk chasms and some of Spain's longest caves.

Wildlife

Spanish animal life, as throughout Europe, has been prone to the devastating changes instituted by man. Many species have disappeared because of over-hunting and loss of habitat, while others cling to survival in precariously small numbers. Spain, with more natural spaces than anywhere else in Western Europe, is often the last bastion for species such as the brown bear and pardel lynx.

Ironically, shifting demographics and infrastructure have proven disastrous for some of Spain's species, while beneficial for others. The Iberian lynx, which once ranged as far as the north coast of the Mediterranean, is now down to an estimated three breeding pairs in the southern mountains of Spain. Likewise, the brown bear, known for its laziness in reproducing, has dwindled to fewer than 100, the result of lost habitats. On the flipside, there has been a steady migration of people from the country to the cities of Spain over the last 30 years. As the countryside has been left devoid of people, vegetation in areas previously devoted to agriculture has returned and such prey species as Iberian wolves, roe deer and wild boar have increased significantly.

Each of the geographical regions in Spain claims a unique roster of wildlife. In Galicia there are mountain goats, hare, field mice, assorted birds and Iberian wolves. The Cantabrian Mountains harbor fallow deer, shrew mice, chamois, eagles, vultures and wild boar. In the Pyrenees are muskrats, ermines, large cats, mountain goats, a few bears and wild boar. Central Spain has badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, deer, rabbits, moles, partridges, quails,

storks, and the list goes on. Andalucía has weasels, dormouse and, in the Doñana Reserve, the most important collection of wildlife in all of Europe with flocks of flamingos and raptors channeling between Western Europe and North Africa. The following are descriptions of the most prominent species.

■ Mammals

Spanish ibex (*Capra hircus*): This goat-like animal was teetering on the brink of extinction at the end of 19th century until King Alfonso XIII banned hunting in the Sierra de Gredos near Ávila. It has since rebounded to over 10,000 in number. Males are grayish-brown with white underbellies, dark tails and two long, slightly curved, ribbed horns. Females have shorter horns. Ibex are great mountain climbers, living at elevations above 2,000 m (6,500 feet).

Spanish ibex

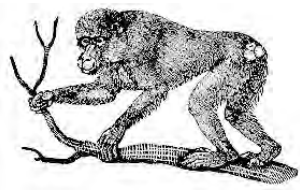
Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*): This nocturnal species is common to the peninsula. It slinks through scrubland and tall vegetation searching for carrion and birds. Red with white underbelly, the fox has a bushy tail with a white tip. The Iberian fox is less common, smaller and darker in color.

Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*): Spain is the last refuge for European wolves. Fully 70% live on the Iberian Peninsula; their range was once unlimited, but is now restricted to the northern mountains and coast. Recent numbers are estimated at around 1,500. The shade of their coat varies with the seasons, but generally the wolves have a long, reddish muzzle, chestnut to black mottled fur and dark markings on the front legs. In the winter their coats are heavier and a darker gray or red. The wolves face an uphill battle as shepherds and farmers continue to hunt them illegally in an effort to prevent livestock kills. The wolves are now being bred in captivity in the hopes of reintroducing them to the wild.

Cantabrian brown bear

Cantabrian brown bear (*Ursus arctos*): Since the earliest times, the bear has found itself in the direct path of human encroachment and only recently were laws targeted at eradicating the bear repealed. These days, fines are stiff and farmers may be compensated for any livestock losses they incur as a result of the bear. Only 100 bears survive, limited to the Cantabrian and Pyrenean mountain ranges of northern Spain. Preserving their woodland habitats and educating rural laborers is crucial to boosting the brown bear's numbers.

Barbary ape (*Macaca sylvanus*): The Barbary ape is not, in fact, an ape but a species of macaque, a short-tailed monkey native to Asia. No one knows quite how these monkeys made it to the rock of Gibraltar, but they've become an emblematic feature. There are about 50 in all and they will eat out of your hands (and will bite them). They are wild and should be treated as



Barbary ape

such, even though they are rather cute. The British government, which claims Gibraltar, has assigned a soldier to feed and tend to the monkeys, which residents complained were getting into garbage cans and generally monkeying around.

Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*): A common sight in the high mountain regions, the chamois is an agile, goat-like animal with a grayish coat, a white face with black eyeliner, small, candy-cane-shaped horns and a short, dark tail. During the summer they climb to feed on alpine vegetation and, with snowfall, descend beneath the treeline. The chamois is often confused with the Spanish ibex, which has much larger horns, is larger and has a lighter coat and no facial markings.

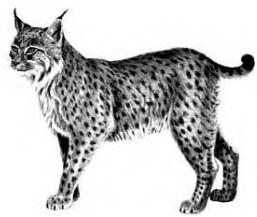
Egyptian mongoose

Egyptian mongoose (*Herpestes ichneumon*): The snake killer of southern Spain has an evenly colored amber coat, a long body and neck, short, skinny legs, a small, pointed head and a long tail with a furry tuft at the end. The mongoose feeds on eggs and amphibians and is commonly seen around scrublands and marshes, often with a litter of three or four trailing behind. It is sometimes confused with the common otter, which is larger and does not have a tufted tail.

Otter (*Lutra lutra*): The playful otter is a fixture on the rivers and waterways. With its webbed feet, it is a powerful swimmer capable of staying below the water for extended periods during its fish hunts. While the otter is threatened throughout much of Europe, it enjoys healthy numbers in Spain. It is a light brown with an off-white belly and short tail.

Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*): This is the most common species of deer. It lives in woodlands and in pastures, where it can usually be seen at dusk or in the early morning light. It is blond in color with a white patch near its short tail.

Pardel or Spanish lynx (*Lynx pardina*): A rare and precious sight, the Spanish lynx is one of Spain's most endangered species. Some 40 pairs are estimated to remain, the majority in the Parque Nacional de Doñana. The lynx favors woodlands and rarely ventures out during the daytime, preferring to hunt rabbits at dusk. Its coat is a dingy brown spotted with black. It has tufted ears and a short tail with a black tip.



Spanish lynx

Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*): Once threatened, the wild boar has successfully rebounded to become a frequent sight in the woods and scrublands of the peninsula. It is a large, fat and ugly creature with a coarse grayish-brown coat (depending on whether or not it has been wallowing in mud lately), a ridged back and short tusks. It grunts as it digs up roots and seeds, often damaging farmland in the process. The wild boar is usually seen in multiples.

■ Birds

Set between Europe and Africa along yearly migratory routes, Spain's skies are sometimes filled with thousands of different bird species. Many make stopovers at the Parque Nacional de Doñana, the struggling Tablas de Daimiel marshlands in La Mancha and on the eastern coast at L'Albufera

and the Ebro Delta. Yet, curiously enough, Spain does not have a national bird.

Spanish imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca adalberti*): The country's majestic flyer is highly endangered, estimated at only 100 surviving pairs. Most are in the Parque Nacional de Doñana and the Parque Natural de Monfragüe in Extremadura, where they build nests high atop pine trees in lowland forests and scour the fields for rabbits and small mammals. Other eagles seen in Spain include the threatened Bonelli's eagle, a medium-sized bird with a mottled brown and white plumage. Of the 1,000 or so estimated to survive in Europe, roughly 75% are in the mountainous Mediterranean regions of Spain. The booted eagle has a light body with darker wings; it breeds in Portugal and Spain during the summertime, with considerable numbers on the Balearic Island of Mallorca. The **golden eagle** is the most common eagle found throughout Spain year-round, predominantly in the mountain regions such as the Pyrenees, where it nests on cliff faces or atop tall trees. The **short-toed eagle** has brown plumage with white underneath; it prefers warm, dry areas of woodland or dehesa.

Black stork

Black stork (*Ciconia nigra*): The once-threatened black stork remains far less common than its more gregarious cousin the white stork, but is making a rebound, particularly in the Parque Natural de Monfragüe. It is smaller than the white stork and a solid black, with the exception of its light-colored underbelly. It spends its summer months in Spain, nesting along rocky crags or atop isolated trees in undisturbed forests near streams and marshes. It returns to tropical Africa in October to spend the winter.

White stork (*Ciconia ciconia*): The white stork is common throughout Spain and, unlike the black stork, not shy of humans. It builds its gigantic nests atop roofs, chimneys, battlements and church bell towers. It's easy to spot soaring with the thermals in search of fish with its large white body and black wing tips.

Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*): In its migration from Africa the flamingo prefers areas of high salinity along Spain's Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, with high concentrations in the Parque Nacional de Doñana and Las Marismas del Odiel. The flamingo is not always pink, as it requires a healthy supply of crustaceans to give its pale plumage the striking color that will attract mates. It uses its strong, sharp bill to crack shells.

Raven (*Corvus corax*): The large, shiny black carrion feeder is a common sight throughout the open country.

Eleonora's falcon (*Falco eleonorae*): Found in the western Mediterranean, Eleonora's falcons feed on smaller birds and breed on rocky cliffs along undisturbed coast lines and sparsely populated islands. Its greatest numbers are in the Aigües Tortes National Park, Islas Baleares, Canary Islands and La Albufera in Valencia.

Bearded vulture

Bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*): Also called the lammergeier, this highly endangered raptor has an estimated 60 pairs left living above the tree line of the Pyrenees Mountains. Of the four vultures found in Europe, it is the

rarest, a fiercely territorial bone-feeder with long black wings and a golden-colored breast (caused by its rubbing against calcareous rocks possessing iron oxides). It takes its name from the long tuft of feathers near its beak.

Black vulture (*Aegypius monachus*): The largest bird of prey in Europe and a rare sight for the average birdwatcher, the black vulture is an increasingly threatened species that nests in trees or on rocky ledges near open lands where it feeds on carrion. Its greatest numbers are located in the Parque Natural de Monfragüe, the Montes de Toledo, Doñana, Sierra de Gredos and Sierra de Guadarrama. As its name suggests, the black vulture is all black with a small white band across its beak.

Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*): This common vulture feeds on leftovers from the black vulture. It is a migratory species found in a variety of habitats, though it prefers cliffs for nesting and uses high thermals for soaring and circling above its meals. It has large, dark and broad wings with splayed tips and a small, lightly colored head characterize this vulture.

Lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*): Spain's most common gull, a frequent sight around trash heaps, marshes, the shoreline and hovering above fishing boats. Fully grown, it is either gray or white with pale legs.

Tawny owl (*Strix aluco*): A nocturnal that feeds on small birds, the tawny owl is either chestnut brown or gray with white mottling. Its habitat is woodlands and its familiar hoot serves as a territorial warning, as a courtship call and to announce the discovery of food.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*): The most frequently observed duck in Spain, it has a vibrant green head, a tawny breast and either chestnut or white plumage. Found in wet areas where it searches out aquatic plants and invertebrates.

Marbled teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*): A threatened duck with light brown plumage speckled with dark and light spots and a darker patch around its eye. It is a relative of the pochard, though far less common, and breeds in shallow fresh waters with thick aquatic vegetation.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*): The sparkling kingfisher swoops down from treetops to dive after fish in rivers, lakes and along the coasts. It is a fairly common sight in Spain, with a bright bluish-green upper body and an orange chest with a long bill. It nests in holes along dry banks.

Capercaillie

Red kite (*Milvus milvus*): An abundant species that frequents open landscapes and wooded areas in search of carrion and small mammals. It has a rich walnut plumage with light spots on the underside of its wings and a forked tail. Its relative is the larger black kite, which is darker and has a squared tail.

Capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*): The largest member of the grouse family, the capercaillie is a rare and beautiful sight. It is a large bird with a metallic teal breast, dark brown wings and a thick tail. The male has a curious mating dance characterized by guttural drumming and the splaying of the tail into a fan-shape. Its habitat is the woodlands of the Cordillera Mountain range.

Bee eater (*Merops apiaster*): An accomplished flyer with teal and yellow markings, brown plumage and pointed wings. The bee eater nests in holes along Spanish river banks during the summer and feeds on flying insects.

Great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*): An unmistakable bird, both in sound and appearance. It is a resident of forests, with distinct alternating bands of black and white with a splash of red on the underside of its tail and near the back of its neck. It flies through the air in a wave-like manner and hammers woods with its beak in search of insects.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*): A striking bird often seen in open fields, it has a yellow breast and broad wings of alternating black and white bands. A crown of feathers atop its head is banded in white and tipped in black. It uses its long bill to dig up ground worms.

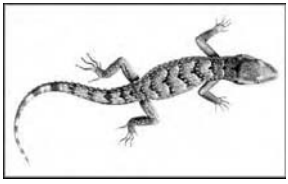
Azure-winged magpie (*Pica pica*): Found in central and southern Spain, the colorful magpie is at home in strands of cork oaks and lowland forests. It has a black head with a pale body and lavender wings. Large numbers are concentrated in the Iberian Mountain Range along the eastern coast.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*): A common local species with rust-colored wings tipped in black and paler underside with dark mottling. Females have a rust-colored head while males are gray. It is a hoverer that dines on insects and small mammals. Its relative, the lesser kestrel, has gray wing tips that yield to black, particularly in a band across the tail. It is smaller and more threatened.

■ Reptiles & Amphibians

Pyrenean brook salamander (*Euprocuts asper*): This long salamander (up to six inches) has a rough skin that is either brown or dark gray with dark spots and an orange colored strip across its back. The brook salamander lives at altitudes up to 3,000 m (9,840 feet) in the Pyrenees Mountains and is most active in brooks and streams during the spring and summer. It is generally nocturnal and, during the winter months, nearly impossible to locate as it burrows well beneath the ground to hibernate.

European pond terrapin (*Emys orbicularis*): The common freshwater European turtle is naturally slow and moss green in color. It enjoys sunning on rocks or logs but slips into the water when approached. It is related to the stripe-necked terrapin, whose bright orange stripes early in life eventually fade to a light yellow.



Moorish gecko (*Tarentola mauritancia*): In its search for insects, the tiny Moorish gecko, left, is attracted to outdoor lights at night. It uses its sticky footpads to climb walls in rural pueblos and is commonly found scrambling around indoors during the daytime.

Striped tree frog

Striped tree frog (*Hyla arborea*): The bright green frog is common to marshy lands. It sleeps on leaves or tall reeds that conceal it and feeds on insects at night.

Lataste's snub-nosed viper (*Vipera latastei*): An endemic species immediately identifiable by its horn-shaped snout, Lataste's prefers low-lying hill areas

around the Pyrenees Mountains where it feeds on small mammals. Its venom is not particularly dangerous to humans, but it can kill a rat.

Fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*): One of four varieties of salamander in Spain, this one has a deep black body with bright yellow or orange markings. The skin produces an irritant that can agitate mucous membranes and occasionally kill small prey like earthworms and beetles. The fire salamander requires a moist habitat near water, usually in forested areas, and rarely makes forays during the day.

Montpellier snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*): Common to dry, rocky areas and scrub with lots of lizards, which are its main prey. Though venomous, the Montpellier snake is normally not aggressive and has deep-seated fangs that make it difficult to penetrate the skin of larger prey. It is dark blue with a white underbelly and a distinctive ridge above its eye.

Protected Natural Areas (Espacios Protegidos)

Over the course of Spain's environmental movement (which could be said to have begun in 1918 when King Alfonso VIII established the first national park), vast expanses of the country have been set aside. These spaces include 12 national parks that make up 1,226 sq km/478 sq miles (or 4% of the country), a host of natural and hunting reserves, and many other protected areas totaling more than 400 protected spaces in an area over seven million acres. While the national government is responsible for managing the 12 national parks, the governments of the 17 autonomous communities are charged with managing other protected spaces within their borders. *Parques Naturales*, or natural parks, are the largest of these, followed in size by *Parajes Naturales* and *Reservas Naturales*. *Reservas Integrales* are protected reserves of scientific interest within a larger park; they are generally closed to the public and used for breeding or research of rare or endangered species or to protect aviary nesting grounds.

Visitor Centers have been established at the entrance to or in the nearest town of nearly all *espacios protegidos* to offer information, pamphlets, trail maps and guided tours. Entrance fees serve to support the parks. In some cases, the number of visitors per day is limited; arrangements must be made in advance to visit. Do make plans ahead of time as often only those with applicable credentials are allowed access.

Picos de Europa National Park (formerly National Park of La Montaga de Covadonga) is the largest natural park in Europe, covering 64,000 hectares (158,000 acres) of the western limestone ranges of the Cordillera Cantabrica rising in the Autonomous Regions of Castilla y León, Cantabria and Asturias. Forests of beech, oak and birch trees share the moist confines with the chamois that scramble across the caves, spires, sinkholes, and alpine lakes. Wildflowers color manmade hay meadows that sustain the area's livestock industry and serve as habitat for small herds of the world's last wild horses; copious varieties of orchids, the endangered holly and a third of Europe's butterfly population are delicately balanced with raptors, three species of eagle, eagle owls, peregrine falcons and the nearly extinct capercaillie, a type of grouse.

Tourists usually begin a tour of the park at a shrine commemorating the 722 Battle of Covadonga, indicating the spot where the Spanish Christian army held fast against encroaching Moors who, nonetheless, would rule the country for another 750 years. Trout and salmon fishing can be excellent here and preferred hikes include the Mirador de Ordiales and the more trying ridge of the Cornmon Massif to Vega Huera refugio, at least a two-day trip.

Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park was set aside in 1918 by royal decree in hopes of protecting the bearded vulture and the declining Spanish ibex, in existence only here. The Alpine ibex has rebounded from the brink of extinction to repopulate the mountains of Switzerland, France, Italy and Austria. Spain's ibex, however, lingers on the brink of extinction. The 15,608 hectares (38,567 acres) of protected land is situated in the heart of Aragon's Pyrenees. Characterizing the three glacier-scarred valleys born out of Monte Perdido (Lost Mountain) are the precariously perched glaciers of the Pineta cirque, the deep karst gorges of Escuain and Añisclo enlivened by some 171 bird species, 32 mammals, eight reptile species and four amphibians.

Rock climbers flock to the Petit Vignernale and the Aqiscio Valley, while hikers will find numerous trails for every skill level. The park is open from May through mid-November.

Aigües Tortes and Estany Sant Maurici National Park in the Catalonian Pyrenees is named the "twisted waters." Its 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) of highlands contain continental mountain peaks reaching 3,000 meters (9,840 feet), snaking rivers and cascades, high mountain lakes and crags garnished by innumerable fir stands.

La Mancha's numerous endorheic lakes and seasonally waterlogged areas are the stamp of a hydrological system that marries the rivers Riansares, Záncara, Cigüela and Guiadiana with the region's aquifers. **Cabañeros National Park** covers 40,000 hectares (99,000 acres) of mostly Paleozoic hill country punctuated by vast plains and thickets that stand as exquisite examples of Iberian Mediterranean woodland. **Tablas de Daimiel** is 2,000 hectares (4,900 acres) in the region known as "wet La Mancha" encompassing sweeping plains and inner wetlands that are nesting or resting grounds for at least 200 bird species, including waterfowl and waders along their migratory route.

Doñana National Park is located in the provinces of Seville and Huelva at the delta of the Guadalquivir River. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Doñana is birding heaven with over 50,000 hectares (123,000 acres) comprising wetlands, marsh and coastal dunes. Rivulets and underground streams course through these regions situated along migratory routes between Europe and Africa. Doñana is an isolated roadside stop for caravanning birds and the last hope for many endangered species, including the imperial eagle, purple gallinule, crested coot and lynx. Despite a negligible buffer zone, it is surrounded on all sides by over-developed areas and plagued by years of destructive agricultural practices.

Sierra Nevada National Park stretches across Granada and Almería provinces covering 86,000 hectares (212,000 acres). It combines high mountain and Mediterranean accents that produce sub-alpine steppe, high-altitude deserts and conifer forests.

Cabrera Archipelago Sea & Land National Park is the most recent addition to Spain's National Park system. It is situated on Cabrera, the largest

non-populated island in the Mediterranean, with limestone, stunted vegetation and rich flocks of sea birds (shearwaters, cormorants, gulls and raptors), wall lizards and Eleanora's falcons.

Teide National Park claims 13,571 hectares (33,517 acres) of Tenerife in the Canary Islands. It lies in the bio-geographic region known as Macaronesia, a zone of volcanic origin. A surreal lunarscape surrounds the volcanic highlands of the snow-capped Teide Mountain (an odd sight for a subtropical climate), the highest summit of Spain at 3,717 meters (12,195 ft). The various altitudes allow for a wide range of climatic and vegetation levels that enrich the park with at least 50 indigenous floral species, including the hierba pagonera (*Descurainia bourgaeana*), a yellow-blossoming assortment, the kestrel, the shrike, and a local species of lizard, the lagarto tizón (*Lacerta galloti*).

El Garajonay National Park on the island of La Gomera in the Canary Islands has the most important surviving laurisylvan forests of the archipelago, formed millions of years ago. A UNESCO-designated World Heritage site, its 3,984 hectares (9,830 acres) include forest fauna such as the rabiche and torque (*Columba junoniae*), indigenous pigeons and hordes of insects.

Caldera de Taburiente National Park is one of the world's largest craters (eight km/five miles across at its widest point and over 1,000 m (3,280 feet) deep). Its rim rises upwards of 2,400 m (7,872 feet) and its center sinks to a depth of 600 to 900 m (1,970-2,950 feet), revealing the oldest rock in the archipelago (basal complex) as water drains down its sheer faces. The 4,690 hectares (11,580 acres) shield an important Canary pine ecosystem, home to island birds and innumerable indigenous plant species.

Timanfaya National Park is a recent volcanic landscape from the 18th and 19th centuries protected in Timanfaya. Known as the mountain of fire, it has over 300 craters that have formed during its various periods of activity, leaving the 5,107 hectares (12,614 acres) largely devoid of flora. Here crops are grown in shallow pits sheltered by semicircular stone walls. The common haria lizard maintains its reclusive lifestyle hidden away from the Egyptian vulture and various shearwaters.

Climate

Despite its location in the temperate zone, Spain's rugged terrain gives rise to a multitude of climates. The Cantabrian Mountains in the north mark the uppermost, rainy climate zone. This range separates the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia into a verdant region commonly referred to as Green Spain. Its maritime climate, swept by cold Atlantic airstreams from the north and northwest, varies only slightly in temperature, with generally mild winters and cool summers. These regions endure regularly cloudy skies and an average of 800 mm (31 inches) of rainfall per year.

To the east, Catalunya and the Levant have excellent Mediterranean climates, with warm summers, cool evening breezes and short, rainy winters. Here, as throughout Spain, temperatures drop considerably at higher altitudes. To the south of the Cantabrian range is the extremely varied climate of dry Spain. Its Central Plateau and Ebro River Valley have a continental climate, with freezing winters, dry, sweltering summers and very little rainfall

outside of the occasional fierce thunderstorm. The temperature ranges from 25-33°C (77-91°F) in the summer months and 5-18°C (41-64°F) in the wintertime. Along the southern coast, site of Spain's most developed summer resorts, the summers are treacherously hot, while the spring and fall months (April-June and September-October) have perfectly sunny weather. Despite reports to the contrary, winter, even on the Costa del Sol, is usually too frigid to enjoy the beach.

Travelers have two options, either brave the nastier weather and avoid the tourist crush, or enjoy good weather while enduring the crowds. Spring is usually ideal for visiting the central regions of Castille, Andalucía, the Mediterranean coast and the Balearic Islands with their mild, but occasionally rainy climate. By summer, the sun is often unbearable and the afternoon siesta takes on a renewed importance. Summer is perfect for the northern regions and resorts along the Cantabrian coast, while fall is a good time for the entire country. In the winter the Mediterranean coast enjoys the mild temperatures that the Canary Islands have year-round, with an average temperature of 73-84°F.

Government & Economy

> *"'The Lazy Spaniard' has passed into a proverb. The wide world knows his picture – that broad sombrero, romantic cloak and inevitable cigarette. But how about the laborious Spaniard? He deserves not to be ignored."* Katherine Lee Bates, *Excessive Toil in Spain*, 1899

■ Political History

Beginning in 218 BC, the successive governments of Spain fell under the rule of Romans, Visigoths, Arabs and, since the middle ages, Christians. Under the Christians, the Spanish government blossomed throughout the "Golden Age" as the center of the far-flung Hapsburg Empire of **Charles V**. In the late 16th century, the arts began to thrive under **Philip II** as a result of Cervantes, Velazquez, Lopez de Vega and El Greco. The Habsburg dynasty reached its zenith and declined during the 17th century under the inept rule of **King Carlos II**. A short revival followed under **Carlos III** of the Bourbons, but as the 18th and 19th century approached, Spain's government grew increasingly unstable due to the Napoleonic wars and internal political vendettas.

In 1931 **King Alfonso XIII** abdicated his power to the left-wing republic, which was shortly thereafter crushed by **General Franco** in the Civil War of 1936-1939. This fascist regime lasted until Franco's death in 1975, when a democratic parliamentary monarchy was restored. The new constitution of 1978 partitioned the country into 17 autonomous regions and created a bicameral parliament (Cortes) divided into the **Congress of Deputies** and the **Senate**, which holds legislative power. The **Prime Minister**, elected every four years by citizens over the age of 18, is responsible to the Cortes. The 202 senators are chosen by direct election and the 350-strong congress is elected every four years by proportional representation.

In 1981, rebel factions among the Spanish security forces seized the Cortes and attempted to impose a military-backed government. The bulk of the military, however, remained loyal to **King Juan Carlos**, who used his respected

authority to put down the bloodless coup. Beginning in 1982, the **Partido Socialista Obrero Español** (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers Party) came into power under **Felipe Gonzalez**. For the next 13 years this party would rule, its democracy largely emphasizing pragmatism and technocracy over ideology. During this period Spain joined NATO and the **European Community**, from which it has benefited considerably.

In the mid-90s Gonzalez found himself at the head of a minority government and a country that was gradually overcoming its historic distrust of the Right. A lingering economic recession and allegations of corruption only heightened the general disillusionment with the government. In 1996, boosted by the backing of several regional parties, the right-wing **Partido Popular** (PP), the majority party in the Cortes, won the election, with **José María Aznar** as its head. Aznar moved to decentralize powers to the regions and liberalize the economy with programs of privatization, labor market reforms and measures aimed at increasing competition in key markets such as telecommunications.

After some initial difficulties, the PP found its stride as it began to fully integrate into European institutions and qualified for the European Monetary Union. Under Aznar, Spain has taken part in military operations with the United States and other NATO countries in Yugoslavia and in the air war against Serbia in 1999. Its armed troops and police detail form part of the international peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and in Kosovo, where one of its generals commands the NATO forces. Spain's military consists of an Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Civil Guard, National Police and Coastal Civil Guard.

A landslide victory in 2000 allowed Aznar to expand his increasingly popular economic and reform policies unencumbered by the coalitions that initially worked to thwart his success. By 2003, however, the prime minister's popularity had begun to wane. The Spanish population, already outraged by the government's irresponsible handling of the *Prestige* tanker and resulting oil spill that devastated the the Galician coast, felt increasingly voiceless when the government sided with the US and British allies in the war on Iraq, which over 90% of the population was opposed to. Spaniards who had so staunchly embraced democracy with the fall of Franco began to feel their freedom was slipping away. Protests were widespread and Aznar was frequently likened to Franco for his unpopular actions. It remains to be seen exactly which road the new Spaniards will take. It seems certain, though, that the conservative regime that Aznar espoused will be replaced by the left-wing socialists, most likely headed by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

■ Autonomous Communities

By the mid-1980s, 17 regions covering all of peninsular Spain, as well as the Canary and Balearic islands, had earned autonomous status (*comunidades autonomas*). This was largely the result of historical and geographical isolation and the distinctive cultural self-determination in many of the regions. Each of the 17 regions maintains a separate parliament that governs its various provinces. These provinces are typically named after their capital city, as with the city of Zaragoza in the Zaragoza province of Aragón. As the central government continues to devolve powers to these regional governments, each will eventually have full responsibility for social and environmental pro-

grams, education, health care and transportation. Starting in the north, the regions include Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Basque Country, Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla y León, Aragon, Cataluña, Valencia, Murcia, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and Andalucía.

■ Terrorism

Despite notable attacks, including the assassination of premier Admiral Carrero in 1973, the **Basque separatist organization** (ETA) has shown signs of attrition as a result of internal splits and wavering security forces. Both the PSOE and the PP have taken relentlessly hard lines against ETA by endorsing broad and occasionally illegal activity through its intelligence agencies. ETA, otherwise known as Basque Fatherland and Liberty, is a terrorist organization founded in 1959 to secure Basque independence. Its targets are primarily Spanish armed forces and government officials and its weapons are, more often than not, hidden bombs. The Spanish Government attributes over 800 deaths to ETA terrorism since its inception, including the failed assassination attempt of José María Aznar in 1995.

In 1999, ETA ended a "cease-fire" it had maintained since 1998, and has since been blamed for the deaths of some 30 Spanish officials and citizens. Widespread demonstrations by anti-ETA groups tend to follow these attacks, underscoring the general sentiment that its tactics are detested by Spaniards outside the País Vasco (Basque region) and most within. More recently, the Spanish government, with help from French authorities, has had greater success in reining in ETA. Though the ETA may be crumbling, it remains to be seen whether or not ETA will ever be completely obliterated. In the past few years ETA has explicitly directed its attacks toward the Spanish tourism industry. ETA does not actively target foreign tourists, though, preferring to focus its action on the infrastructure. And almost always its attacks are preceded by warning, which the Spanish government is quick to disseminate to the public.

Another resistance group known as **GRAPO** sought to overthrow the Spanish Government and establish a Marxist state during the 1970s and 80s. Though less impacting than ETA, its urban terrorist network has a long rap sheet of bombings, assassinations and kidnappings. The majority of its members have been deported or thrown in jail, yet its existence and its views opposing Spanish participation in NATO and the US presence in Spain linger to this day.

In 2003, during the lead-up to war in Iraq, the Spanish government headed by Prime Minister José María Aznar of the reigning, conservative Partido Popular, joined the US-led coalition in Iraq. The coalition's mission, or guise as some have called it, was to disarm Saddam Hussein of his purported nuclear weapons and root out any support for terrorists within that country. Spain's support of the Bush policy entailed sending a small, mostly symbolic contingent of Spanish soldiers to the war-ravaged country, a move that immediately outraged the Spanish public – over 90% of whom were said to be opposed to such a war – spawning mass protests throughout the country.

With elections for Spanish Prime Minister just around the corner in 2004, Spain was characterized by a heated, increasingly polarized political climate in which opposition leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, head of the right-wing Socialista party, appeared to be capitalizing effectively on the

growing sense of discontent among the Spanish public. In the early months of the war, Spain – which many felt had overcome a major political and psychological hurdle by electing the Partido Popular to power in 1996, the first such conservative party since the dictatorial regime of Franco that had ended in 1975 – appeared on the verge of another climactic political shift. The Socialista party was gaining precious public support by aligning itself with the prevailing Spanish view, which maintained that going to war in Iraq was a terrible mistake.

But as the months carried on, the protests became less frequent, the cries of outrage less pervasive. Though Aznar had publicly declared he would not run for another term as prime minister, his Partido Popular had largely recovered from the political fall-out at the outset of the war and had since carried a number of crucial, telling regional elections leading up to the major elections for prime minister in mid-March. It was expected to be a tight race. No one in Spain could have expected the tragic events that would precede it.

On the morning of March 11, simultaneous explosions rocked commuter trains at Madrid's central Atocha train station as hundreds of commuters traveled to work for the day. As word of the explosions spread across the country, a fear not unlike that which the Americans had experienced in the aftermath of September 11 gripped the Spanish population. Candlelight vigils were held throughout the country, and the anti-war protests resumed with a newfound vigor.

The Spanish government, headed by Aznar's Partido Popular, was quick to implicate the Basque Separatist Group ETA in the attack, though ETA had never perpetrated an attack of such magnitude. Since its inception in the 1960s in the name of independence for the País Vasco from Spain, ETA had been mostly content with car bombs and selective assassinations of public officials. Then investigators discovered an unexploded bomb on one of the trains, along with a cell phone that should have been its triggering device. The phone was the first direct link to a group of Moroccans who were later proven to have perpetrated the attacks. As more arrests were made and ETA cleared of any link to the attacks that would come to be known as 'El 11 de Marzo,' Spaniards mourned and decried Aznar's government. There was little doubt that an extremist sect of Moroccans, an ethnicity accounting for Spain's largest minority, had orchestrated the attack in response to the Aznar-led government's stance on Iraq. Days after the attack, a letter was sent to Spanish newspapers by an Islamic extremist group with ties to al Qaeda, which vowed to turn Spain "into an inferno" should its support for the US-led coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan not be withdrawn.

In the aftermath, Spain was poised for drastic political changes. Elections for Prime Minister were held, as scheduled, the following Monday and Spaniards flooded the polling houses. Outraged by the events of 11 de Marzo, they handed a stunning defeat to the Partido Popular by voting into power the leftist Socialista Party headed by Zapatera. The Spanish people had made themselves heard, and once Zapatero had officially taken office, he made good on his campaign promise to remove all Spanish troops from Iraq and withdraw its support of the US-led coalition in Iraq.

■ Foreign Relations

Following years of diplomatic isolation under General Franco, Spain's foreign policy has steadily broadened its relations with the European Community and the West. As a member of NATO since 1982, Spain has participated in numerous multilateral international security endeavors. The ratification of the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union was finalized in 1992 and the euro currency was adopted upon its inception in 1999. Today, Spain's foreign policy is largely that of the EU, through which it often coordinates international efforts. Diplomatic relations with Israel and Albania were normalized in 1986, leaving only North Korea out of the scope of its universal diplomacy.

Spain maintains full relations with its Spanish-speaking counterparts in Latin America. The many trips made to these countries by high-ranking Spanish officials display the effective transition Spain has made from an authoritarian government to one grounded in democracy. Bound by geography and history, as well as the two Spanish island enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's relations with its North African neighbor Morocco are equally extensive. In other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa Spain has broadened its contacts to help foster large aid programs, such as that in its former colony of Equatorial Guinea. Spain is known to support Arab positions on Middle East issues, a result of the country's heritage and its dependence on the importation of oil and gas from these countries.

Previous trade issues with Portugal and France have all been eliminated as a result of Spain's involvement in the EU. Ties with the United Kingdom, though generally good, continue to be strained by the Gibraltar issue. This small escarpment on Spain's Mediterranean Coast has been a British colony since the 19th century. Its inhabitants' single-minded devotion to the UK has only complicated ongoing political negotiations between the two countries. During the war on terrorism Spain has played an active role in seeking out terrorists in its own country and by jailing leading Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists. In 2003, Spain was the only country to align itself with the US-Britain coalition that invaded Iraq. While the country stands to benefit from its support of these powerful nations in the long run, the short-term effects have hurt the Spanish government's popularity. The majority of Spaniards are disillusioned with a government they feel has returned in many respects to the dictatorial ways of the 1950s.

■ A Burgeoning Economy

Spain was endowed with pockets of natural wealth from the beginning. Its coastal waters, with more than 4,000 km/2,480 miles of shoreline, are extremely rich in marine life and have been commercialized from the very earliest civilizations. But it was the wealth in mineral resources that made Iberia legendary in the ancient Mediterranean world. Spain was an early large-scale producer and exporter of wine, olive oil and grain, while the lure of precious and industrial metals brought the first colonists to Gades (Cádiz) in the eighth century BC. Southern Iberia contained rich deposits of silver, lead, iron and copper in Carthago Nova (Cartagena), Sierra Moreno, Río Tinto and Jaén, while in Galicia and León there was gold, copper and tin. Yet it is the harsh landscape, climatic conditions and poor soil quality that give a

clear idea of the toil and ingenuity early Spaniards would have had to invest to scratch a living from it.

"Spain is doing well," was a tagline often quoted by Prime Minister José María Aznar when discussing the country's economy. His was the fastest-growing economy in the EU and its fifth-largest, accounting for 9% of total EU output. Unemployment fell steadily during the Aznar administration (though it remains the highest in the EU at 14%). Put simply, Spain has transitioned from an isolated, agrarian economy to one with strong manufacturing and service sectors. Its economic hurdles, though still a handicap, are gradually becoming issues of the past.

During its so-called "years of development" between 1961 and 1973, Spain's economy grew 7% a year. By 1963 its per capita income had reached $500, elevating Spain from the rank and file of the developing nations as defined by the UN. After joining the EU in 1986 and receiving much needed financial aid, Spain's economy became one of the world's fastest growing, with an annual growth rate of 4.1% between 1986 and 1991 (compared to the EU average of 3%). Similarly, foreign trade grew from $23.8 billion in 1975 to $52.5 billion in 1980 and $143 billion in 1990.

But the honeymoon ended in the early 1990s when the economically favorable seven-year EU transition period ran out and the country's tariffs and quotas on EU imports were phased out. Just as the country was in the grip of a severe recession, its economy was exposed to the full brunt of EU competition. Falling output, an increasing public deficit, along with reduced investment, numerous bankruptcies and rising inflation, put a stranglehold on the country. To salvage its recent economic gains, the country received $22.8 billion in the late 1990s from the EU, specifically to bolster its economic infrastructure. The growing tourism industry, which has been the number one earner of foreign currency for Spain in the recent past, has likewise helped reinvigorate the economy.

The rise of tourism, which many Spaniards still credit to Ernest Hemingway, has coincided with an industrial and construction boom that has largely benefited the middle class. Spanish cities are gradually taking on the sprawling, suburban landscapes common in the US, and one can hardly miss the abundance of new apartment buildings and hotels along the coasts.

Spain's mixed capitalist economy is dependent on a number of main industrial regions. The provinces of Catalunya, Basque Country, Navarro and Madrid account for over half of the country's industrial output. Around 85% of Spanish companies are based in Barcelona alone. On a per capita basis, Spain's GDP is 80% of the EU average, though still higher than Portugal, Greece and Ireland. Trade is largely dependant on France, Germany and Italy.

Geographical & Historical Influences

1. The **Spanish Civil War** caused widespread devastation that set the country's economy back decades.

2. Spain did not benefit from the great economic plans like the **Marshall Plan** that got the rest of Europe back on its feet after the World War.

3. Due to the historical buildup of large estates in the south and west whose owners were lax to improve their lands, agriculture has been neglected for centuries. In the north, Spaniards face the

opposite problem with ***minifundias***, farms too small for subsistence.

4. The **geographical isolation** of the country's regions has made improving mass transportation difficult and costly.

5. The Spanish **temperament** and disregard for pure moneymaking prevented the rise of an energetic industrial class such as happened in the rest of Europe.

6. **Mineral resources** for fuel have been overexploited, mandating that high-grade coal and oil be imported at great cost.

7. The **higher pay** in industrialized European countries has caused the most energetic workers to leave the country, depopulating many small villages in Andalucía, Galicia, La Mancha and Castilla.

The People & Culture

The Spanish are a prideful people, though loyalties usually extend only so far as regional boundaries. It would not behoove the tourist to ask a southern Spaniard what is worth seeing in his or her country. This Andalucian would recommend the Alhambra, the Costa del Sol and perhaps Sevilla's cathedrals, neglecting all that Spain has to offer farther north. A proud and adaptive mélange, light-skinned in the North, darker in the South, the Spanish are a culturally diverse and fundamentally indefinable people.

With the beginning of the modern age came a strict, state-imposed ethnic, religious and cultural centralization. Having expelled the two major minorities – the Jews in 1492 and the Moors in 1609 – what remained was a religiously homogeneous population. Small immigrant minority populations of Africans (brought to Spain during the 16th- and 17th-century slave trade) and Germans settling in the Sierra Morena in the 18th century added to this mix. The gypsies represent the country 's only substantial ethnic minority, though a few groups, such as the *agotes* or *gafos* of the Basque provinces and the *vaqueiros de alzada* of Asturias, survive in small numbers. These groups are historically outcast peoples, shunned by the majority, which saw them as vulgar, deceitful pagans. They continue to live a subjugated existence on the fringes of society, occupying deplorable dwellings in segregated areas of the cities and enjoying no rights or representation under the law. The gypsies, on the other hand, have suffered similarly, but have survived and even flourished to this day. It is believed they arrived in Spain at the end of the Middle Ages, their nomadic ways having soon dispersed them throughout the country. Their highest numbers exist in Barcelona, Madrid, and the larger southern cities where they manage to preserve their own cultural and social organization.

Ethnocentricity runs high, likely a result of Spain's historical isolation from the rest of the world. While Europeans and Latin Americans have few problems fitting in, the integration of Africans and Asians has proven more problematic. These racial views, though, rarely extend beyond the dinner table and have ignited only a few violent conflicts during recent history. Surveys

have shown the level of hostility toward foreign immigrants in Spain is one of the lowest in Europe.

History

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
George Santayana, American philosopher and writer born in Spain

Santayana's words aptly characterize Spain as it takes its first steps in the 21st century. Few countries so staunchly cling to their past while actively seeking to overcome it. This is a contradiction that has confronted Spain at each step in its history and one the country is only recently beginning to turn in its favor.

■ Pre-History

During its early history prior to the Roman conquest Spain gathered its character from the Iberians migrating from North Africa, from the Celts of southern France, from the Phoenician and Greek sea merchants of the Mediterranean and from a host of others who came and left. Considered separately, each of these civilizations sought to exploit the peninsula and brought with it distinctly non-Spanish customs.

To delve even further into the country's past, make tracks for the cave walls of **Altamira** near Santander. Here in 1868, a hunter stumbled upon perhaps the best surviving examples of pre-historic Iberian life: vivid polychrome paintings depicting bison, wild boar, horses and anthropomorphic figures dating to the Magdelanian Period, roughly 15,000-9,000 BC. Similar paintings from this period have been found in other parts of Western Europe, indicating that Spain was not so wholly isolated by geography as people have thought.

Further proof of a Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) hunting culture that survived from 20,000 BC to the end of the last Ice Age around 10,000 BC is seen in the **Cuevas de Nerja** (Andalucía). At Atapuerca's Cueva Mayor and Cueva Ciego, a trove of archeological remains (including human bone fragments of 30 Neanderthals that likely perished when the roof of their cave collapsed) date back even further, some 500,000 years, spanning from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age. **Gibraltar Woman**, left, a 50,000-year-old skull discovered in 1848 at Forbes' Quarry near Gibraltar, is the first proof archeologists had of the Neanderthals' existence. These early people, with their oblong craniums and stocky, robust frames, were eventually displaced by the markedly advanced Cro-Magnons (*Homo sapiens*) arriving from Africa over 40,000 years ago. By 6000 BC, immigrants from Mesopotamia and Egypt appeared and in the years prior to the Age of Metals; the various inhabitants were farming and practicing animal husbandry, navigating via piraguas (canoes) and creating highly ornamented works of art. The first megalithic stone monuments (dolmens) were constructed around 3500 BC to serve, at least initially, as sepulchres, with the best examples found at **Antequera** (Andalucía). By the end of the Bronze

Age excavated tombs indicate that the inhabitants were enduring periodic invasions and clashes with a new breed of settlers. These dramatic changes would spell the end of the primitive age.

■ Pre-Roman Hispania

The earliest accounts of a native Spanish people, whom the Greeks referred to collectively as Iberians, were during the sixth century BC. This mixture of dark-skinned tribes, from which the modern Basques may or may not have descended, likely immigrated from North Africa and the Mediterranean Coast around 1600 BC. They mined silver near the Río Tinto, gold from the upper valley of the Guadalquivir, wore elaborate jewelry as a consequence, practiced religion and shared a common language. As this civilization evolved, it established small city-states in the south and southeastern regions surrounding the Guadalquivir and effectively practiced agriculture. Some time after 1000 BC, the fair-skinned **Celts**, heirs to southern France and the Danube Basin, crossed the Pyrenees into Northern Spain, hastening the dilution of Iberian culture. They established defensible towns most notable for their circular houses (*castros*) for protection in the continued warfare of the northern Iberian regions and, attracted by the natural wealth of the Iberian lands to the south, advanced as far as the Río Tajo by 700 BC. In the Central Meseta the Celts mixed with the Iberians to create a hybrid culture known as **Celtiberians**. These tribes controlled much of north-central Spain and from there eventually waged the most successful counter to the Roman advance. Madrid's Prado and National Archeological Museums house some fine examples of pre-Roman, Iberian culture, including elaborate gold jewelry, painted ceramics, silverware, coins and bronze votives. Of particular pride among archeologists are the eight monumental stone statues of Iberian warriors from Cerro de los Santos (Porcuna) that date to the fifth century BC, human sculptures (*damas*) from Elche and reliefs from Osuna. The Iberians and Celtiberians engaged in trade with a succession of new civilizations that began to arrive on the peninsula – the Phoenicians who established Gades (Cádiz) around 1100 BC, on the southern coast – which some scholars link to the fabled kingdom of Tartessos – and the Greeks, who founded the trading villages of Emporion (Empúries) and Hemeroskopeion (Denia) around 550 BC. The arrival of the Carthaginians from modern Tunisia about 650 BC signaled the end of the Greek and Phoenician trading dominance and the beginning of Roman Hispania.

■ Roman Hispania

During the **First Punic War** (264-241 BC) the Carthaginians had fought for and lost control of Sicily to the Romans, the emerging superpower of the Mediterranean. Seeking to shore up its trade in the west, the Carthaginians invaded the Iberian Peninsula. In 228 Hadrubal founded Carthago Nova (Cartagena) on the east coast. Tensions with Rome escalated, leading to the **Second Punic War** (218-201 BC), in which the Carthaginian General Hannibal and his elephants were routed in Rome and in Spain. The Roman victory over the Carthaginians at Ilipa (Alcala del Rio) in 206 BC and Zama (Carthage) in 202 BC effectively marked the beginning of Roman Hispania. Over the next 600 years the Romans would transform the backward lands of the Iberian Peninsula into a flourishing civilization. They were the first to successfully unite the peninsula, which they governed as the three territories

of Baetica in what is modern day Andalucía, Lusitania in modern day Galicia and Portugal, and Tarraconensis in the remaining lands to the east.

The Romans invented a political and judicial system and introduced great feats of civil engineering that would establish Spain's first roads, remarkable aqueducts like the one that still stands in Segovia, as well as theaters, circuses and temples, as seen in the excavations of Mérida in Extremadura. In the late Roman era Spain was Christianized and, by the time the Romans had been overrun by invading Visigoths, the Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Portuguese languages that are still in use today had been established.

■ Gothic Spain

As the **Huns** made their first appearance in Eastern Europe, Germanic tribes were forced to retreat to the west. The **Franks** and the **Alemanni** were the first to penetrate the Iberian Peninsula, followed by the **Vandals**, **Suebi** and **Alans**. Another northern tribe, the **Visigoths**, had successfully established ties with the Romans in Italy, which would facilitate their advancement through the peninsula. In 554 AD they made Toledo the capital of the Visigothic kingdom, heralding the end of Roman Hispania, such as it was. Though much of the once-prosperous Roman political and economic infrastructure was allowed to stay in place, the peninsula fell into decline as peninsular Romans began to revolt. The Visigoths were never able to bring about a cohesive society, paving the way for the Moorish invasion of 711, initially planned as a temporary occupation. A few Visigothic churches in northern Spain, believed to be the earliest on the peninsula, are the greatest surviving monuments of the Visigothic period.

■ Moorish Spain

With the arrival of the **Moors** from Africa in 711, Spain embarked on a magnificent period of change and cultural growth. A popular legend relates the tale of how the Moors came to occupy the peninsula.

KING RODERICK

King Roderick, the last ruler of the Visigoths, was smitten by a young woman named Florinda, the daughter of his close friend and advisor, Count Julian. The King began to watch her as she bathed in the River Turia outside Toledo. In a matter of days his passion had overwhelmed his good sense and he raped the girl. When Count Julian learned of this he resolved to get even and stormed off to Morocco where he recruited the assistance of the Moors and led them into the country via the Straight of Gibraltar. The Moors defeated Roderick's troops and then conquered the heavily fortified city of Toledo with the help of the Count Julian, who had shared his knowledge of the city's vulnerable areas. The Moors would control all of the country with the exception of the northern mountains from 712 on.

Almost immediately, **Christians** in these northern mountains began to consolidate their forces in an effort to drive the Moors south. The Moors, both Arabs and Berbers, called their kingdom **Al-Andalus**. Its borders would con-

tinually be redefined during the next 750 years. Under Moorish rule the peninsula became the cultural capital of Western Europe. Great advances were made in literature, mathematics, philosophy, medicine and architecture, as evidenced in the great mosque of Córdoba, the minarets and surviving defensive fortifications in Sevilla and the great Alhambra fortress and palace in Granada. Throughout the Moorish reign, which peaked in the 10th century, Christian and Jewish practices were generally tolerated, though Christians were forced to pay a tax if they refused to convert to Islam. As the Christian Reconquest advanced, the Moors were forced to move their capitals from one city to another, in the process diluting and dividing their power as smaller Moorish kingdoms became the norm.

■ Moorish Splendor Makes Way for the Christian Reconquest

The first sign of resistance to Islam occurred in the **Battle of Covadonga** (Asturias) in 722 when Visigoth heirs led by the nobleman Pelayo defeated a much larger Moorish army. According to legend, a vision of the Apostle Santiago (St. James) appeared before the Visigoths, inciting them to victory over the Moors. Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor Slayer) would be a constant rallying point for the Christians during the Reconquest. Around this time the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus, which had long ruled the Muslim world, was overthrown by the Abbasids, who subsequently removed the caliphate to Baghdad. Abd al-Rahman managed to survive the coup and established the last Umayyad dynasty in Córdoba. Construction was soon begun on La Mezquita (the mosque) and, as the Caliphate of Córdoba emerged to lead Al-Andalus in the 10th century, Moorish culture reached its zenith under Abd al-Rahman III (912-961). In addition to their inimitable architecture, their vast libraries and medical institutions, the Moors had introduced citrus fruits, rice and saffron. They also mastered irrigation practices that had been developed by the Romans. Lustrous gardens bloomed; Christians, Jews and Moors lived in relative harmony; and Córdoba became the largest city in Europe.

The Christian Asturian kingdom had shifted its capital to León in northwestern Spain when the dictatorial Moorish general Al-Mansour ascended to power and began to launch devastating raids into the Christian-controlled north. Great cathedrals were destroyed and remnants of them carried by the Moors back to southern Spain, where they were incorporated into Moorish constructions.

By the 11th century, when Al-Mansour's son took office, infighting among the Moors had resulted in the splintering of the Córdoba caliphate into many of smaller kingdoms known as taifas, of which Sevilla and Zaragoza were the most influential. In the meantime, Castile, a small region east of León, had emerged from a desolate, insignificant land to become the seat of the Christian Reconquest during its most telling phase in the 11th century. As the Christians made steady advances to the south, taking the once-powerful taifa of Toledo in 1085 under Alfonso VI, the Moors grew desperate for assistance and in a pivotal move recruited the **Almoravids**, an Arabic fundamentalist sect that controlled North Africa. In short order another Moorish sect, the **Almohads**, had seized power in North Africa and invaded the Iberian Peninsula. The years in which Christians, Jews and Moors lived together in

relative peace were over as these fanatical groups persecuted Christians, many of whom fled north to join the Reconquest. In the 12th century the Almohads established Sevilla as their capital and, for a short period, the rich Moorish culture was revived as they built the Giralda tower atop their mosque and made new advances in philosophy and medicine.

Central Spain had become a frontier land, where possession of its most important cities shifted back and forth between the Moors and the Christians. The tide began to turn in favor of the Christians when a marriage united Aragón with Cataluña, creating a powerful second arm in the east to complement Castile as it worked its way through the central and south of the country. These armies combined to defeat the Almohads in the pivotal battle of **Navas de Tolosa**, paving the way for further incursions into Andalucía, the last region to be dominated by the Moors. By 1248 Sevilla had fallen to the Christians, leaving Granada as the last bastion of hope for the Moors. Under the Nasrid dynasty Granada became a splendorous refuge for the Moors. The astonishing Alhambra palace was the epicenter of this, the last flourishing Moorish culture in Spain.

The marriage of Ferdinand of Aragón to Isabella of Castile united the peninsula's two powerful kingdoms, offering the first tantalizing glimpse of Spain as a potentially unified nation. The **Reyes Católicos** (Catholic Monarchs), as they were called, launched the final assault on the teetering Moorish kingdom in 1482. The Moors retreated to their Alhambra and, after 10 years of bitter infighting had taken its toll, the Catholic Monarchs took the city in 1492. The ousted Moorish leader Boabdil was exiled to the mountains of the Alpujarras with promises that the Moorish culture would be respected under Christian rule, a promise that proved difficult to keep.

■ Christian Development

During the years of the Reconquest the Christian cause had developed on a number of fronts. At the head of the Reconquest was Castilla (Castile), which was merged with León to the west by Fernando I in 1037 and soon transformed from a wild frontier into a staunch supporter of the church and unification, by and large one and the same cause. Eventually, this kingdom would claim all or parts of the modern day provinces of Cantabria, Asturias, Galicia and Castilla y León. It was a land of castles, hence the name, and of gathering military might. Meanwhile, the neighboring regions of Navarra, Aragón and Cataluña had emerged as small, independent kingdoms. Royal marriages would unite Aragón and Cataluña under the banner of the Kingdom of Aragón in the 12th century, of which Cataluña would be the strongest player due to its powerful navy and profitable seaports. As the Kingdom of Castilla dealt with political uprisings and increasing anti-Jewish and Moorish sentiments during the 13th through the 15th centuries, the Kingdom of Aragón was focused on increasing its power in the Mediterranean. This kingdom had expanded its dominion as far as Athens but, like Castilla, had weakened by the 14th century as the Black Death took its toll and colonized Mediterranean countries fought successfully for independence. Great changes were in store when Isabella of Castilla wed Ferdinand of Aragón, each subsequently taking control of and uniting their respective kingdoms.

Unification was the central motive underlying the Catholic Monarchs' reign. Ferdinand was a successful military leader and wily politician while Isabella was a pious, if somewhat fanatical Catholic unequivocally devoted to her vi-

sion of uniting the peninsula. Together they were a force to be reckoned with as they ranged across the country imposing order while reigning in the nobles who had hitherto reduced the country to fiefdoms. Before they had completed the Reconquest by capturing Granada, the Catholic Monarchs had revived the brutal Spanish inquisition in 1478 to persecute alleged heretics, particularly those among the 500,000 Jews living in the peninsula who were thought to have secretly been practicing Judaism despite their conversion to Christianity. A few months after Granada was taken, the over 200,000 Jews who refused Christian baptism were expelled from the country. With the Jewish mass exodus, commerce and public administration on the peninsula suffered heavily. Nor were Muslims exempt from the Inquisition. Their language was banned and Moors were forced to convert to Christianity; those who did so and stayed in the country came to be known as **Moriscos**. The Moriscos never truly relinquished their culture, though, and the impossibility of their assimilation into Christian Spain led to their complete expulsion by 1614. Before the Spanish Inquisition had run its course toward the end of the 18th century well over 10,000 'heretics' had been executed, often in the gruesome public ceremony known as the auto-da-fe.

In 1492 **Christopher Columbus** (Cristóbal Colón) sailed the ocean blue to seek a new route to the Orient. Columbus had failed to convince neighboring Mediterranean countries of the potential such a route could have, but his promise of new riches seduced the Catholic Monarchs, who offered support. They would not live to see this dream become a reality, however. Columbus set sail from Palos de la Frontera on Spain's southern Atlantic Coast on August 3 with three ships, 120 men and the expectation that he would receive one tenth of the wealth from his discoveries. After a stop in the Canary Islands, Columbus' crew sailed for 31 days before they encountered the Caribbean island of Guanahaní in the Bahamas. He would go on to discover Hispaniola, Cuba and other Caribbean Islands during his next three voyages. It was not until his last voyage that Columbus realized his dream by landing on the continent of South America, but by this time it had already been discovered. Columbus never received the wealth he was promised and he lived out the rest of his days as a poor man, a 'failure' for not having discovered the continent.

■ The Habsburgs & the Aftermath of Discovery

A convoluted mess of marriages and successions by the heirs of the Catholic Monarchs led to the ascension of **Carlos I** to the throne in 1516. Carlos was the son of princess Juana la Loca (Joanna the Crazy), who had been deemed unfit to rule for debatable reasons, and her husband Felipe El Hermoso (Philip the Handsome). Through inheritances, Carlos I would acquire not only Spain but its Italian holdings, Flanders, the Low Countries and Austria, for which he was proclaimed Emperor Carlos V. With the addition of the colonies in the New World, the Emperor controlled the largest empire the world had ever witnessed. He had come to the throne speaking Flemish and not a word of Spanish. That inspired resentful Spaniards to revolt in 1520 during the **Guerra de las Comunidades**, which the Emperor successfully put down. Though Carlos spent little time on the peninsula during his reign, he was gradually able to win over the vast majority of Spaniards because of his strong stance against the rise of Protestantism throughout his kingdom.

During his reign resources from the wool and shipping trade could have secured Spain a comfortable economic position for generations to come, but the Emperor's repeated conflicts in Europe fleeced the empire's resources and he was forced to abdicate his thrown in 1556. The Emperor retired to live out his last years in Yuste, an isolated mountain village in Extremadura, passing the throne to his son Felipe II.

■ The Golden Age

Emperor Carlos V's son **Felipe II** (1556-1598) inherited Spain, its colonies in the New World, the Low Countries, and a legacy of financial irresponsibility. Spanish conquistadors had subjugated the great empires of the Incas and Aztecs in the Americas, expanding the Spanish crown's holdings to include Florida, the Caribbean Islands, Central and much of South America. They had introduced Catholicism, beasts of burden and European diseases to the colonies and in return received Spanish galleons at the port of Sevilla laden with gold and silver bullion and spices. Spain was filthy rich, yet it was bankrupt for having meddled in European affairs since the Emperor's time, and it was still paying heavily for that. Under Felipe II the Spanish Armada defeated its Mediterranean rival the Ottoman Turks in the **Battle of Lepanto** in 1571, only to be devastated by the British under Sir Francis Drake in 1588. Spain's coffers were further depleted as foreign investors capitalized on the new wealth in Spain, and yet Felipe insisted on the costly construction of his monolithic monastery of El Escorial. He had moved the capital of the country to Madrid in 1561 and from there ruled what remained of his empire, namely Spain, the American colonies and Portugal, which he'd acquired in 1580.

The economic outlook was further dimmed under Felipe II's successors, Felipe III (1598-1621) and Felipe IV (1621-1625). The former was a feckless ruler who wasted much of his reign in moving the capital from Madrid to Valladolid and back. He preferred hunting to ruling the country and his successor was no improvement. Besides squandering more money on ill-advised battles in Europe, Felipe IV managed to lose Portugal and, for a short time, Cataluña. His most disastrous move, however, was in marrying his daughter María Teresa to Louis XIV, all but ensuring that, once the throne was vacated, the French Bourbons would step in to fill it.

Yet despite the precarious political and financial situation, the arts had begun to flourish. **Miguel Cervantes Saavedra** (1547-1616) wrote his famous *Don Quixote*, and other literary greats emerged, among them the playwrights **Lope de Vega**, **Tirso de Molina**, **Calderón de la Barca** and the poet **Fray Luis de León**. The painters **El Greco**, **Zurbarán**, **Ribera**, **Murillo** and **Velázquez** each played a role in Spain's Golden Age. The splendid period drew to a close when Carlos II (1665-1700) was unable to sire an heir to the Hapsburg throne and the French Bourbon dynasty appeared poised to assume control of the country under Felipe V (1701-1746).

■ The 18th Century

Fearing that France would come to dominate Europe, the throne was contested by the Austrians and their allies the British and the Catalans during the **Spanish War of Succession** (1702-1713). While Felipe V was able to take control of the Spanish throne, he had lost Flanders, Milan and Naples to the Austrians and Menorca and Gibraltar to the British during the course of

the war. Felipe implemented political and economic reforms, and his successor **Fernando VI** (1746-1759) was responsible for putting an end to the Inquisition; but crucial changes would not occur until **Carlos III** had taken the throne in 1759. Carlos was a modernizer and naturalist. Under his reign he improved roads and ports and catalogued the flora and fauna of not only Spain but its American colonies as well. In 1788 **Carlos IV** assumed the throne just as the French Revolution was taking shape. Spain was left in a vulnerable position when the King's domineering Italian wife, **Maria Luisa**, developed an intimate relationship with a young royal guard by the name of **Manuel Godoy**. Strangely enough, the king promoted Godoy to foreign minister and the powerful trio began to blunder its way through years of ineffective diplomacy with the French. After declaring a short-lived war on France in 1793, the two countries reconciled their differences and banded together against the British, only to be trumped by Nelson's fleet off the southern Mediterranean Coast near Gibraltar. Godoy's ties with Napoleon, however, had opened the door for a French invasion. As the French poured into the country under the auspices of taking control of Portugal, it became clear that they had no intention of leaving Spain. The trio was forced to flee to their palace in Aranjuez and, after a series of abdications, Napoleon took control of the country, appointing his brother Joseph ruler.

As the French swept across the country in a devastating wave, peasants began to take up arms against them in what amounted to guerilla warfare. By 1813 Napoleon's troops had been run out of the country, but not without exacting a great toll on Spanish lives and infrastructure.

The Bourbons returned to the throne under **Ferdinand VII** after the French had been defeated in the battle of Vitoria in the País Vasco. A year before Ferdinand took office a National Cortes (parliament) had convened in Cádiz to draft a new constitution based on liberal ideals in an effort to spread democracy throughout the country. Ferdinand quickly repealed the constitution and made his name by brutally dealing with liberals and other dissenters. His campaign of terror endeared him to few Spaniards and his narrow political vision resulted in Spain's loss of the majority of her colonies in the Americas.

Spain was split over King Ferdinand VII's heir, the infant **Isabella II**. The prospect of a female ruler incited the king's brother Carlos María Isidro to embark on the **First Carlist War** (1833-1839), with the backing of the church and conservative rebels from the País Vasco, Navarra, Aragón and Cataluña. The Carlist War proved a debilitating blow to the Spanish economy and political unity. Isabella, however, had the backing of the army and would go on to rule from 1843 through 1868; she accomplished little during her reign other than to establish the Guardia Civil police force and cause greater dissension between the conservatives and liberals. By none of her doing, the economy had begun to rebound as the leading port cities of Cataluña and the País Vasco experienced an industrial revolution. General Juan Prim overthrew Isabella in 1868 and three years later the country became embroiled in the **Second Carlist War** (1872-1876), again because of disputes over the rightful heir to the throne. The Italian prince Amadeo of Savoy had taken the throne in 1870, but Spanish Royals had opposed his reign and divided their lines, one in favor of Don Carlos' grandson Carlos, the other in favor of Isabella II's son Alfonso. When Amadeo abdicated the throne in 1873,

the liberal Cortes declared the First Republic, dividing Spain into 17 autonomous states. Within a year the republic had collapsed and Alfonso came to the throne (1874-1885) amid a political scene ripe with corruption.

■ Into the 20th Century

Throughout the second half of the 19th century increasing wealth of the bourgeoisie and a strong labor movement resulting from the industrial revolution in the País Vasco and Cataluña had paved the way for anarchism. As a result, two prime ministers and scores of citizens were assassinated or killed in bombings. One such bomb was intended for King Alfonso XIII on his wedding day but missed, killing 24 innocent bystanders. Alfonso had grown increasingly distant from the liberals in Spain as his ties with the military, the church and the wealthy landowners became more evident. The latter were responsible for much of the poverty in less developed Spanish regions, leading poor migrants to leave their homes in Andalucía, Galicia, Extremadura and other rural Spanish regions for the promise of work in industrial cities like Madrid and Barcelona. Overcrowding only fueled the social unrest. Socialism was gaining popularity just as regional nationalism began to reassert itself in the País Vasco and Cataluña, regions that now enjoyed secure economies due to industrialization.

In a further blow to its morale, Spain lost its Armada and the last of its American colonies (Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and Guam) to the United States during the Spanish-American War of 1898. Then, in 1909, the **Semana Trágica** swept through the streets of Barcelona. This week of tragedy began as a strike, when Catalan army reserves were called up to fight an unpopular war with Morocco. The strike soon escalated into a full-scale revolt. Seventy buildings were destroyed and over 100 workers were killed as the government attempted to bring order to the streets. But chaos was by now the norm.

Spain had managed to stay neutral during World War I, but in 1921 the country had new troubles of its own. A Spanish military campaign in Morocco that had resulted in the death of thousands of Spanish troops paved the way for the century's first dictator. Capitalizing on the ruined political system, **General Primo de Rivera** seized the government in 1923 and set up a rather lazy military dictatorship with the support of **King Alfonso XIII**, who had become little more than a figurehead. By 1930, though, issues of Catalan nationalism, a growing Republican movement and a downturn in the economy had resulted in the general's resignation. When the Catalan-led republicans won the major city elections that year, King Alfonso XIII went into exile in Italy. This marked the beginning of Spain's Second Republic (1931-1936), which would polarize the country and set the stage for Civil War.

The poor, liberals and anti-clericals supported the **Second Republic**, while the conservatives with their military values and staunch Catholicism opposed it. The socialist leaders of the Second Republic made advances in separating the church from the state, gave women the right to vote, espoused good intentions with land reforms that would have favored the poor over the powerful noble land owners, and granted Cataluña its own autonomous parliament in exchange for political support. The land reforms were never carried out and the granting of autonomy to Cataluña only heightened fears throughout the country that its national unity was being compromised. Spaniards voiced their discontent at the polls in 1933 by returning a

right-wing government to power. The rise of the right allowed **José Antonio Primo de Rivera**, son of the former dictator, to found the fascist party Falange, which relied increasingly on violence against the left; the left, in turn, began to murder right-wing government officials. By the time coal miners in Asturias attacked the army and took control of the region of Asturias in 1934, civil war was imminent. The right-wing **General Francisco Franco Bahamonde** was recruited to squash the uprising, which he accomplished after much effort and loss of life.

■ The Spanish Civil War

The elections of February 1936 underscored the right-left rift in the country as the **Popular Front** narrowly defeated the right-wing **Nationalists**. Fearing such an outcome, Generals Franco and Mola had planned a coup and believed the country would fall in a matter of days to the Nationalists, with the greater support of the army behind them. When Madrid, backed by Barcelona and the eastern provinces, put up an unexpected defense, the coup inevitably slid into Civil War.

After a small but pivotal revolt by the Spanish army on the island of Melilla, Franco had led his troops into Spain and was able to take Sevilla with little resistance. For the next three years the country would be fiercely divided over the direction its government should take, leading Spaniards to exact terrible atrocities on their own countrymen. Franco's rebel troops (the nationalists) pressed for Madrid, but were unable to take the city. Time meant that massacres increased as Republican sympathizers were hanged, shot, tortured to death or pushed over cliffs in Nationalist-controlled cities, while in Republican-controlled areas thousands upon thousands of clergymen were murdered for their support of Franco. In the meantime, Hitler and Mussolini came to the aid of the general, while the Republicans received support from Stalin. The USA, France and Britain all played the neutral card, though they did not prevent their citizens from covertly joining the Republican lines as members of the **International Brigade**.

With the assistance of German war planes, Generalísimo Franco (called "superior general" now that he was the leading voice among the Nationalists), was able to quickly spread his forces across the peninsula. Soon he had given himself the title *caudillo* (military strongman) and recruited the Falange party as his political arm. Within a year, only Madrid, a strip of northern coastal provinces and the east, headed by Barcelona, remained out of Nationalist control. Internal strife plagued the Republicans as communists, moderates and anarchists vied for support. The International Brigade moved in to support the Republicans, but as the sheer might of the Nazi and German military assistance became apparent, the Soviets began to withdraw their support. World War II was just around the corner. The Republican north collapsed shortly after Hitler's air force methodically bombed and decimated the Basque town of Gernika. The Republican government moved its headquarters to Valencia and a year later to Barcelona as the battle shifted to the east, where the Republicans mounted an offensive around the town of Teruel in 1838. After a drawn-out battle for the Ebro Valley that would be one of the deadliest of the war, Franco prevailed and the Nationalists successfully moved to cut off Barcelona from Valencia. In early 1939 the Nationalists took Barcelona and, soon after, Madrid and Valencia, the last Republican strongholds, collapsed. The Spanish Civil War was officially over by April 1, 1939.

The cost: some 350,000 deaths, ideological divisions that continue to this day, and the ensuing 36 years of brutal military dictatorship under Franco.

■ The Dictatorship

While Spain did not actively participate in World War II, it openly sympathized with Axis powers, making it a target of debilitating economic sanctions during the post-war era. The irrepressible Franco, meanwhile, ruled with an iron fist. He was both head of the military and head of Spain's only political party, the Movimiento Nacional. Under his reign freedom of the press was squelched, leftist parties and trade unions were banned, as were any displays of regional tradition, including the languages of Galicia, País Vasco and Cataluña. Ironically, the Cold War proved beneficial to Franco as the US offered financial aid in exchange for the right to establish military bases in Spain.

As the years under a totalitarian regime took their toll, Spaniards became increasingly bold and organized frequent peaceful street protests, while artists began to push the limits of censorship. Change was inevitable. In 1954 Spain resumed its ties with the Vatican and in short order had been admitted to the United Nations. The economy began to recover as foreign investment rolled in to develop Spain's coasts and industrialize its cities. The result was a mass exodus of poor villagers into these cities, leaving the former devoid of young workers and the latter overcrowded. It was a change Franco was loath to prevent. He also allowed the emergence of the Basque separatist terror group ETA in 1968, the gathering momentum of Communist trade unions, and student protests.

■ A New Democracy

Spain was regaining its voice and growing rapidly by the early 1970s. Franco, fearing the end, had chosen Alfonso XIII's grandson **Juan Carlos** as his successor. Carlos had sworn his loyalty to the Franco regime, but when the dictator died on Nov 20, 1975, he revealed himself to be a democrat. Juan Carlos was sworn in at the age of 37 shortly after Franco's death. He appointed Adolfo Suárez as his Prime Minister in 1976 and Suárez quickly acted to legalize trade unions and the socialist and communist parties. In 1977 he organized the country's first democratic elections since 1936 for a two-chamber parliament that would write a new constitution, one that would not have an official religion and ultimately devolve much of the central government's power to its 17 autonomous communities. The **Unión del Centro Democrátic** (UCD), a centrist party headed by Suárez, won the majority of the seats in the parliament, followed by the leftist **Partido Socialista Obrero Español** (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Worker Party). The transition to democracy was not without its bumps in the road. Shortly after Suárez had stepped down on February 23, 1981, an armed band of Civil Guards led by Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero Molina occupied the Cortes and called for a military coup. Backed by his military ties, King Juan Carlos gave a moving speech in which he denounced Tejero's actions and successfully put down the coup.

With the fall of Franco, Spaniards had embraced democracy. It marked the end of censorship and unwieldy church powers. There was an increase in women's rights and the birth of sexual freedoms as divorce, contraception and abortion were legalized. In the midst of it all the filmmaker Pedro

Almodóvar captured the spirit of these changes in what would come to be known as **La Movida** (The Movement), a cultural flowering in which painters like Antoni Tápies and writer Camilo José Cela burst onto the scene. In 1982 Spaniards elected the PSOE's Felipe González Márquez as the new Prime Minister and the old fears that had brought about the Civil War were silenced as the Spaniards proved they could elect a leftist party without flirting with communism. In that same year Spain joined the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization** and in 1986 the **European Union**, fostering an economic boom that lasted through the early 1990s. In 1992 Spain hosted the Olympics in Barcelona and the World Expo in Sevilla, but the economy had begun to falter as the world slipped into recession.

In 1993 the PSOE won its fourth election but had failed to win a parliamentary majority, forcing it to make political pacts with Catalan and Basque nationalist parties. Corruption pervaded the political scene and when the Catalan's **Convergència iUnió** (CiU) withdrew its support of the PSOE, González was forced to call early elections in 1996. The right-wing Partido Popular was elected with a mild-mannered tax inspector named **José María Aznar** as its Prime Minister. In yet another sign that the past was just that, the Spaniards had shifted from a leftist party to a conservative party with no fears that it marked the return to a Franco-esque dictatorship.

Aznar may have lacked charisma, but he had a strong sense of fiscal responsibility and devoted himself to strengthening the Spanish economy by privatizing industry and cutting expenditures. Interest rates and unemployment fell and by 1999 Spain had met the standards required to join in the launching of the new European currency, the euro. Aznar drew praise for making a strong stand against the Basque separatist group ETA and even managed a ceasefire that lasted 19 months until late 1999. Led by Joaquín Almunia, the Socialist Party attempted to paint the PP as a return to Franco in the 2000 election; the tactic failed as the PP enjoyed an overwhelming victory and Almunia was forced to resign. A moving and shaking lawyer, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, replaced him. Zapatero made sweeping changes in the PSOE and benefited tremendously from the public's disapproval of Aznar's coalition with the American-led war on Iraq in 2003. As elections approached in 2004, Zapatero appeared poised to win the election for Prime Minister after the PSOE won more votes in municipal elections than the PP for the first time since 1993. Aznar had indicated he would not run for another term of office and Spain, once again, appeared poised to head in a new, but peaceful direction.

Population & Demographics

There is a growing tendency for people to concentrate in the coastal regions and the cities, as the interior loses population. This has led to increasing industrialization and urbanization. Spain has an aging population of 39,200,000 people. A forecast 24% decline in births over the next 50 years could make it the oldest population in the world. Due in part to its proximity to Africa, it has the highest AIDS rate of European countries. Yet, despite drinking and smoking more than any other Europeans, the Spanish enjoy long life expectancies and 87% of the population declares itself happy!

■ Many Tongues

The official language is **Castilian** Spanish, spoken by 75% of the population. The Spanish Constitution, however, recognizes the right of the Autonomous Communities to use their own languages. Other officially recognized languages are **Catalan**, 17% (Catalunya and Islas Baleares), **Gallego**, 7% (Galicia), **Euskera**, 2% (País Vasco and Navarra), **Valenciano** (Valencia) and **Mallorquin** (Balearics). Other statutes give special protection for the languages of Bable in Asturias and the linguistic diversity in Aragón.

■ Catholicism Rules

During the Middle Ages, Christianity cohabited with both Judaism and Islam but, since the time of the Catholic Kings, Catholicism has been the compulsory religion of the Spaniards. Although few actively participate outside of celebrations and the traditional rites of birth, marriage, and death, 99% of Spaniards are professed Catholics. The regions of Castilla, Aragón, and Extremadura are perhaps the most zealous in practice.

■ One Big Happy Family

The Spanish family has undergone radical transformations throughout this century as a consequence of shifting demographics and changes in the value system concerning employment. The principal change, the same as in the majority of European nations, is a transition from the extended family typical of rural societies to a nuclear model, made up of a married couple and children – more in keeping with urban industrial societies. Still, it is not uncommon for a Spanish home to shelter a husband and wife, elderly grandparents, 30-something kids who still "don't know what they want to do in life," and grandkids. Elder care facilities are often frowned upon, though their numbers are steadily increasing.

The Spanish family has been traditionally founded upon the institution of marriage, which at present is still largely performed according to Catholic rites. In recent years, however, the number of exclusively civil ceremonies has increased and, outside of Sweden, Spain has the lowest rate of marriage in the EU. Cohabitation, as a consequence, is increasingly accepted.

■ Education

The university system dates back to the Middle Ages. The oldest Spanish university is Salamanca, founded in 1218. Spain's present educational system is a descendant of the 19th-century liberal university, inspired by the centralized French model. Under this model, the Spanish population has enjoyed an impressive 97% literacy rate over the age of 15. According to the Ministry of Education, primary (six-year) and secondary (four-year) educations are compulsory and free of charge up to age 16, the legal age to start work. This coursework can be undertaken in public schools or private Catholic schools, which roughly one third of students attend. Having earned the *graduado en educacion secundaria*, students work another two years for a baccalaureate degree (*titulo de bachillerato*). Students must succeed in all subjects and pass an entrance examination to enter a university. There are two different types of university study: the single cycle, which lasts three years and is tailored toward specific professional fields; and a three-cycle program that bestows B.A. and doctorate degrees. Unlike the US educational

system, religious instruction must be available at all schools, though participation is voluntary.

Foods

The cuisine is as varied as the landscape. Culinary reputations go hand-in-hand with the regions. Where Extremadura is known for its modest country fare like *migas* (bread soaked in water, then fried with bacon and dry peppers), the País Vasco and, to a lesser extent, Cataluña are recognized as the domain of Spain's most exceptional chefs and a new cuisine that borrows from traditional recipes but far surpasses them in creativity and variety. These regions' traditional dishes are not without merit, though; the País Vasco is known for its *angulas* (baby eels dipped momentarily in boiling water), *bacalao a la vizcaina* (cod with dried peppers and onions) and *bacalao al pil-pil* (cod fried with garlic until the oil turns into jelly), while Cataluña has a delicious *butifara* sausage and tart *sobrasada* similar in taste to chopped southern barbecue. The entire northern Atlantic Coast is renowned for its fresh seafood, often cooked simply using only olive oil and salt.

The most popular regional dishes have found their way to restaurants throughout Spain. In Málaga, it is possible to eat Galicia's *pulpo a la feira* – octopus cooked whole then cut into pieces after beating to soften it – though while in Andalucía it is far more advisable to sample the rich variety of exquisitely fried Mediterranean seafood (*pescaíto frito*). Throughout the country you will find the Spanish ***tortilla*** (potato omelet) and *cocidos* (stews) of broth, vegetables and meat served in three courses in that order. Valencia's saffron and rice dish of ***paella*** is everywhere (over 1,000 varieties exist!), as is Asturias' butter bean stew, the ***fabada,*** and Andalucía's favorite cold summertime soup, ***gazpacho***.

The central plateau of the country, particularly the region of Castilla y León, is known for its tender roasts (***asados***); kid, lamb and suckling pig roasted in clay dishes with only lard spread over them and a sprinkle of salt, maybe a sprig of thyme. To the south in La Mancha the ***pisto manchego*** vegetable stew is the main dinner offering, along with wild game like rabbit and pheasant. Madrid, at the very heart of the country, acts like a magnet for all of Spain's greatest dishes, though it does have one of its own special dishes, ***cocido madrileño***, a stew of chickpeas, potatoes, cabbage, turnips, marrow bones and whatever meats the cook could get his or her hands on.

Bakeries are found on almost every corner in Spanish cities and villages. Known in Castilian Spanish as ***panaderías***, they make everything from scratch overnight and throughout the day, including their breads and delicious pastries. Try the flaky fan-shaped ***palmeras***, sometimes covered in chocolate or apricot jam, or the tubular chocolate-filled ***napolitinas***. Bakeries offer a variety of drinks and one to try is ***Bio Fruta***, a mix of natural fruit nectar and pasteurized skim milk served in a chilled carton (the three flavors from best to worst: *pacifico*, *mediterranea* and *tropical*). Popular desserts include the inexpensive ***arroz con leche*** (rice with sweet milk – if you watch TV in Spain you'll grow to hate these commercials), the sweet tooth's favorite ***churros con chocolate*** (slender doughnuts dipped in thick, dark chocolate), the more fanciful ***bizcochos borrachos*** (meaning literally drunk cake), a sponge cake soaked in liquor, and *flan*. Every morning, in every

household across Spain, someone will undoubtedly be drinking hot ***Colacao***, a chocolate drink like Nêstlé's Quik, but better.

Hundreds of books have been devoted exclusively to Spain's cuisine and trying to hit the highlights in two paragraphs is like trying to speak Spanish after 10 minutes of study. The best advice is to look around, see what the Spaniards are eating, ask questions, expand your palette and stay the hell away from McDonald's!

■ Tapas

(tapa) *n.f.* **1,** lid; cover; cap; top. **2,** pocket flap. **3,** *usu.pl.* tidbits; hors d'oeuvres.

Spaniards *tapear* with gusto, bouncing from one bar to the next, eating a slice of tortilla here or cured ham there. Going out for these bite-sized morsels is a way of life here. Each afternoon around 2 pm and again in the evenings around 9 pm *tapas* bars fill their countertops with dishes full of cold salads, jamon Serrano, empañadas (pies filled with meats, seafood or veggies), cabrales cheese from Asturias or manchego from La Mancha, chorizo sausages, baby eels and octopus, cod, meat stews and on and on. To *ir de tapas* is not only a great way to get immersed in the culture and meet new people but an ideal way to sample a variety of Spanish cuisine without spending too much money.

The smallest servings, placed atop slices of bread and handled with a toothpick, are called ***pinchos***. ***Tapas*** are a single serving and ***raciones*** are larger servings meant to be shared. Customs vary. In some cases you'll need to point out what you want to the bartender. If you're curious about a price, ask *cuanto vale un pincho, una tapa or un racione*. With *pinchos*, which are set out on large plates, you need only request a plate and help yourself. The bartender will count the number of toothpicks to know what to charge. In Sevilla and the País Vasco *tapas* are a way of life. In Granada, *tapas* are free with the order of a drink and get better with each successive drink.

HOW DID TAPAS START?

No one knows exactly how *tapas* came about, but the story goes that during an official visit to Cádiz, King Alfonso XIII stopped into a bar with his entourage and ordered a *fino* (dry sherry). The wind had picked up and the bartender placed a slice of cured meat over the king's drink. When the king asked why, the bartender said he had placed the 'tapa' (lid) so that the sherry would not be filled with sand. The king liked the idea so much that he ate the ham and ordered another sherry, with the tapa. Seeing this, the king's entourage ordered the same. In the future, as he traveled across the country ordering his sherry with a *tapa*, the tradition spread.

Wines

Spanish wines have been produced for over 2,000 years, but only lately, as wineries have embraced modern techniques, are they enjoying an increasingly favorable reputation throughout the world.

The most famous among them are the high quality reds from the region of La Rioja, dry sherries from Jerez de la Frontera in Andalucía and Cataluña's Penedés reds and whites and, to a lesser extent, its cava (champagne). These wines come from hundreds of grape varieties, many of them native; the finest reds are derived from the black tempranillo, a highly aromatic grape with a balanced acidity.

> **Did you know?** Spain has over 100 different classes of wines derived from over 30 areas that have qualified for inclusion in the *Insituto Nacional de Denominaciones de Origen* (National Institute of the Denomination of Origin).

If you are a novice wine drinker, consider ordering the house wine in restaurants and bars. This will almost always be a good young wine produced in or near that particular region. The following is a quick rundown of some of the major wines and the regions where they originate.

- **Andalucía**: dry and very fragrant *finos* (sherries) from Jerez; dry Manzanilla from Sanlucar; dark sweet raisin Moscatel wine from Málaga.
- **La Mancha**: widely popular young table wines that are smooth and dry with relatively no acidity. The best come from Valdepeñas, though Mancha, Méntrida and Almansa are also big producers.
- **Castilla y León**: reds and rosés (*rosados*) with a high alcohol content produced using Bordeaux barrels and underground cellars by Rueda, Toro, El Bierzo and the well-respected Ribera del Duero.
- **Galicia**: respected whites with high acidity and sugar content from the Rías Baixas.
- **Asturias**: sidras, sharp, dry apple ciders.
- **El País Vasco**: slightly bubbly white wines with a high degree of acidity, known as Txakolí.
- **La Rioja**: wines from three regions, Rioja Baja (heavy, fruity wines with high alcohol), Rioja Alta (matured wines aged in oak vats with moderate alcohol content) and Rioja Alavesa (highly aromatic with low acidity). Vino Crianza wines must be aged for at least one year in vats and another in bottles. Vino de Reserva is aged for two years in vats and another year in bottles. Vino de Gran Reserva is aged in oak barrels for at least three years and another year in bottles in underground *calaos* (cellars).
- **Navarra**: Full-bodied red and notable rosé wines, often of a quality to rival neighboring La Rioja.
- **Aragon**: deep red wines with high alcohol content produced by Cariñena, Campo de Borja and Somontano.
- **Valencia**: dry whites from the central province of Valencia; reds and rosés with high alcohol content from Alicante; and thick, dark reds aged in oak barrels from Jumilla.
- **Cataluña**: exceptional reds and whites from Penedés and Priorato, others from Ampurdán-Costa Brava, Alella, Costers del Segre, Tarragona and Terra Alta; *cava* (champagne) is produced using French techniques in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia.

Major Holidays & Festivals

Besides the most important holidays, such as Christmas, Holy Week or All Saints Day, every town and city, even neighborhood and profession, has its patron saints, whose feasts last for days on end. These high feasts take place in summer and fall, following harvest time. They include such internationally famous names as **Sanfermines** in Pamplona, **Las Fallas** in Valencia, **San Isidro** in Madrid and Sevilla's **Feria de Abril**. Each celebration is covered in greater detail in the section of this book on the specific city.

■ Winter

January, **Los Reyes Magos**

The Day of the Three Kings, in which elaborate parades trail through the city streets around the Kings in their full regalia and other costumed local officials. In the islands, the Kings arrive by sea. These relatively new celebrations began with Seville's in 1916.

January 17, **Saint Anthony Abbot Feasts**

Dating to the 14th century, this street festival takes place only in La Puebla de Mallorca. "Canconers del camp" parade through streets lit by bonfires. Regional songs are sung to beating drums and tambourines while the "colla de demonis" sing and dance to guitars and lyres. Dressed in old-fashioned costumes, the entire procession ultimately arrives at the altar of Saint Anthony, which they bless.

January 19 & 20, **Tamborrada de San Sebastián**

The deafening sound of drums incites wild crowds of people dressed in costumes to celebrate the Patron Saint of the city.

February 3, **Endiablada of Almonacid de Marquesado**, Cuenca

Dating to pre-history, boys dressed as devils and wearing paper hats ring cowbells as they run through the street, crowding churches and pretending to wash the statue of San Blas.

February 11, **Santa Agueda of Zamarramala**, Segovia

This is an ancient religious festival in which governors' wives wear 12th-century dresses and lead the procession of Saint Agueda. Trailing behind are the married women dressed in farming clothes. Later there is a banquet in which the priest is the only male present and, to close the celebration, there is a dance called "Baile de Rueda."

February/March, **Carnival Festivals** of Cádiz, Tenerife & Sitges

These celebrations mirror the Carnival of Brazil in appearance. In Cádiz, parades and parties lead to fancy dress balls, comical contests, fireworks and a spirited climax the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. In Santa Cruz de Tenerife folklore contests and the singing of native songs surround a parade of traditional floats. The vocal gay and lesbian population brings Sitges to a sizzle with the climactic drag parade through the streets.

■ Spring

March 9 to 17, **The Madalena Festivals**, Castellon de la Plana

On the third Sunday of Lent for over five centuries a cavalcade and parade have led a pilgrimage to the hermitage of Saint Mary Madalene. This is followed by a return procession at night and, in the end, the parade of the *gaiatas*, which includes honorary pilgrims traditionally illuminated by oil lanterns and shiny decorative dress, along with bishops whose cross-topped staffs signify their office.

March 15 to 19, **Fallas de San Jose**, Valencia

The *crida*, a public announcement made by the queen from the Torres de Serranos, begins Las Fallas. A pyromaniac's greatest fantasy, Las Fallas is marked by parades and costumes celebrating age-old Valenciano traditions and lore that lead up to the spectacular *Nit del Foc* (Night of Fire) when the *fallas* (alternately grotesque and comical scenes made of cardboard figures) are set on fire.

March 31 to April 7, **Semana Santa**, Holy Week

Celebrated by the whole country, the festivities of Semana Santa in Sevilla are the most famous, followed by those of Córdoba, Málaga and Valladolid. In Sevilla, crowds and various brotherhoods march along a traditional route that ends at the Giralda tower. The crowds, and the celebrations, are some of Spain's craziest during this week leading up to Easter.

April 22 to 24, **Moors & Christians Festival**, Valencia

A number of villages in Valencia celebrate this festival, the most popular of which is in Alcoy and it is certainly a sight to see as groups representing the Moors and Christians face off in battle to the accompaniment of noisy bands and fireworks. I think we know who wins this festival each year.

April 23 to 28, **La Feria de Abril**, Sevilla

The city is captivated during these festivities of never-ending drink, dance and song. Once only a livestock market, La Feria is now characterized by Flamenco music, dancers and festivity tents. The bullfights in the Plaza de la Maestranza crown the event.

May 8 to 15, **Fiestas de San Isidro**, Madrid

In honor of its patron saint, the Feria de San Isidro rises to a peak on May 15. Open-air events and bullfighting are a few of its many celebratory facets.

May 25 to 27, **The Rocio Pilgrimage**, Almonte (Huelva)

Oxen-drawn carts decorated with flowers and figurines and horseback riders accompanied by girls in Andalucian dress cross the countryside to the Sanctuary of Nuestra Señora del Rocio. Religious ceremonies and celebrations ensue, accompanied by traditional songs and a nighttime rosary lit by candles.

May 26, **The Caballada**, Atienza

This event is characterized by horse races in celebration of the race of Atienza in 1162 to free King Alfonso VII from his throne-seeking uncle, Fernando II of Leon. In the end, a new elder brother is elected in front of the Church of the Trinity.

■ Summer

June 25, **Corpus Christi**

Of these celebrations, the ones in Toledo and Sitges are the best. In Toledo, a solemn morning procession begins this festival of nobles and knights dressed in symbolic colors representing the various medieval ways of life. In Sitges

(Barcelona), flowers cover the city streets and a flower-covered altar is placed in the main plaza. Crowds are blessed with a rain of carnations, followed by a National Carnation Exhibition.

June 20 to 29, **The Bonfires of San Juan**, Alicante

Bonfires of artistic monuments made of wood, cardboard and fabrics are set up at the beginning of the festival and burned down in the *crema* three days later. The bonfires celebrate the different periods and regions of the province with four cavalcade parades. A floral offering to the Patroness of the city, bullfights, and a fireworks display conclude the event.

July 6 to 14, **Los Sanfermines**, Pamplona

This celebration never stops. Each morning the bulls are run through town, led by sometimes stealthy, sometimes stupid young men, to the bullring where the fights are held. Nonstop partying and music keep the festivities alive in-between.

August 3, **Arrionda-Ribadesella,** Oviedo

The scull racers, grouped according to nationalities, begin a race on the bridge over the Sella River sometime in the morning and end 20 km/12 miles downstream at the bridge in Ribadesella. Trains and cars are stopped all along the route as crowds cheer the racers on. A pilgrimage to the fields of Ova Arriondas caps the festivities.

August 11 to 15, **Elche Mystery Play**, Elche (Alicante)

A 13th-century play is performed over two days to honor the Dormition (falling asleep) of Mary, and the ascension of her body and soul to heaven. The cast is all male and the female roles are played by children.

■ Fall

September 15, **The Rice Festival**, Sueca (Valencia)

A National Paella contest leads into a colorful procession to honor Our Lady of Sales, whereupon new rice stalks are offered up.

September 19, **America's Day**, Oviedo (Asturias)

Beginning with a morning mass to honor the Virgin of the Spanish-speaking world, a colorful parade of floats, folk groups and performers representing Latin American and European countries moves through the town.

September 20 to 26, **The Rioja Grape Harvest Festival**, Logroño (Rioja)

Grapes are stomped and an offering of the first wine is made to the Virgen de Valvanera. Carriage and wagon parades and clever contests are held as the traditional Feasts of Saint Mathew are celebrated with bullfights.

September 24, **Festes de la Mercé**, Barcelona

Religious ceremonies, art exhibitions, sporting events and various music and theatrical celebrations are held in honor of Our Lady of Mercy, the Patroness of the city.

October 25 to 27, **The Saffron Rose Festival**, Consuegra (Toledo)

Exhibitions of this region's folklore and the symbolic cutting of the rose celebrate the gathering of the saffron rose.

Spectator Sports

■ Fútbol (Soccer)

Fútbol is big business and its players are gods. Throughout the season and even during the off-season, endless TV time is devoted to the latest on- and off-field antics of players like Ronaldo, Raul and Roberto Carlos. In 2003 Real Madrid, Spain's most successful team and not surprisingly one whose finances have traditionally been shored up by the government, paid Manchester United a whopping 35 million euros for the rights to the star player David Beckham. And Beckham won't even start! For the love of the game Spaniards pile into stadiums each weekend during the Copa del Rey from late August through mid-March to cheer on their local teams. Every major city has one, but most Spaniards root for either Real Madrid or archrival FC Barcelona (*Real* and *Barca* for short). Both are members of the top Primero División (Division One). Tickets go on sale a few days before the game at the box office of each stadium, but if you miss out just pile in to a local bar and join the other 10 million Spaniards shouting at the TV. The Spanish sports newspaper, *La Marca*, comes out daily with all the latest gossip, statistics and game results; it's often easier to find than Spain's national newspapers.

■ Bullfighting

"The bullfight is not a sport in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word; that is, it is not an equal contest or an attempt at an equal contest between a bull and a man. Rather, it is a tragedy." Ernest Hemingway

Spain's Fiesta National is sacred and brutal, loved and hated. The energy of a *corrida* (bullfight) can sweep an ignorant spectator into the moment just as it sends another running for the Plaza de Toros gates.

The *corrida* begins with a parade with participants dressed in 17th-century costumes. It was during this period that the fight (practiced in one fashion or another in southern Spain since the time of the Visigoths) began to come into its own. The Moors had made the *rejoneando* style of horseback bullfighting fashionable and, once they were expelled, it came into favor with the Christian nobility. Fights were held in ruined Roman theaters and makeshift arenas. When King Felipe V railed against the sport as a vicious atrocity, noblemen dropped the sword and commoners picked it up. It became a sport of the people and by the early 18th century the people had their first famous matadors to lionize, the Romeros. The father Francisco, the son Juan and most notably the grandson Pedro molded the sport into what it is today, respectively introducing the *muleta* cloak, the bullfighting team and, by Pedro's time, style. It became an art rather than a sport. The first Plaza de Toros (bullring) was built at the end of the 18th century in the Romeros' hometown of Ronda, shifting attention away from the Sevilla school that had up until then dominated the bullfighting scene. The modern bullfight was born.

The trumpet sounds and the first bull enters the arena. There are six bulls for each *corrida*, and three matadors that will alternate in killing them, or be

killed. The beloved Joselito and Manolete were killed, prompting Hemingway to declare bullfighting "the only art in which the artist is in danger of losing his life." Each season between 150 and 200 matadors are gored, though few actually die from their wounds. The threat is part of the thrill that the matador accepts and the crowd expectantly fears.

As the matador watches, the *capeadores* work the bull with purple and gold capes, revealing its strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. The picadors then enter the affair; riding padded and blinded horses they plunge lances into the bull's neck to weaken its neck muscles so that the head is sufficiently lowered to allow the matador to place the fatal blow. Before the matador begins to work the bull, the *banderillero* has stuck its long *banderillas* in the bull's neck and long darts that stream colorful ribbons above its back spread blood down its side. The matador is judged by the crowd on his grace and daring as the bull makes 40 passes, charging through the red cape as the crowd shouts "Olé!"

Once the bull is thoroughly drained, the matador faces off with it and plunges his sword through the nape of the bull's neck. If he hits the heart and makes a quick kill, he will be applauded. A good overall performance warrants white handkerchiefs from the crowd, a trophy of an ear or tail from the president of the bullring and a victory lap during which the matador is showered with flowers, bandanas and hats. A worthy bull, or at least its carcass, might also be paraded around the arena to much applause. Rarely does a matador die and rarely does a fighting bull survive. Those that do are cheered heartily and allowed to return to their pastures to live out the rest of their days as members of a very elite society.

■ Flamenco

If a flamenco singer has *duende*, it is said, he or she has soul. Such a performance is hard to come by, even in a country that is the birthplace of the passionate song and supports it in nearly every corner. One could see flamenco in Cataluña in far northeastern Spain, but more than likely come away disappointed. In Galicia and the rest of Green Spain, such performances are rare. Moving south brings the traveler closer to the cusp of flamenco. Madrid, as with all things Spanish, does offer the chance to see some good flamenco performances, but not truly authentic. These are in Andalucía, where it all began. They may be held over dinner at a *flamenco tablao* which specializes in the music, at a flamenco festival that supports the real stuff (not the flamenco spectacles held in large theaters in large cities with little *duende*). But the most memorable flamenco performance is one that is impromptu and free, called a *juerga*. Just a voice accompanied by the clapping hands (*toque de palmas*) of friends and a guitar.

No one is quite sure who first created the flamenco, although theories abound. The most likely holds that it began to develop after nomadic gypsies had arrived on the peninsula some time in the 15th century; the *cante jondo*, the typically mournful, tragical and more serious of the two common flamenco styles would seem to support the idea that gypsies, long a poor and suffering race in Spain, played a major role. Jews and Moors living in Spain certainly played a role as well. The pace and sound of flamenco indicate some inspiration from Islamic chants and North African rhythms. The word flamenco itself most likely derived from the Arabic word *felah-mengus*, meaning wandering person (another support of the gypsy theory). By the 17th

century, flamenco had been documented by a number of writers, including Cervantes in his *La Gitanilla*; the heart of flamenco in the following decades was in the Andalucían triangle, comprised of the villages of Sevilla, Jerez de la Frontera and Triana, though other Andalucían villages would soon play a role. Huelva introduced the fandangos, Cádiz the alegria and in 1922 Granada was the first city to host a flamenco song competition. By this time the flamenco golden age, which had begun roughly in 1869 and been marked by an increased support for the art and the opening of the first *cafés cantantes* specialized in hosting flamenco performances, was drawing to a close. Where the early flamenco had been strictly vocal and sometimes accompanied by clapping of hands, the guitar was beginning to creep into the mix.

In the mid-20th century the elaborate spectacles known as *café operas* came into favor. *Tablaos*, restaurants and bars catering to these new flamenco exhibitions, replaced the earlier *café cantantes*. A brilliant man named **Paco de Lucia** also came along and made the flamenco guitar an art form in and of itself. But in the old streets of Sevilla and Córdoba, in the caves of the sacramonte in Granada the flamenco sounds much as it probably did in the beginning. One could pay 30€ to see a theatrical performance make a mockery of the flamenco, or simply follow the sounds to a bar or a home where an impromptu performance is underway. Here, the passions behind the music, rather than the pretty faces and the sexy way the singer shakes her backside, are the focal point of the performance.

Arts & Architecture

"Often while reading a book one feels that the author would have preferred to paint rather than write; one can sense the pleasure he derives from describing a landscape or a person, as if he were painting what he is saying, because deep down in his head he would have preferred to use brushes and colors." Pablo Picasso

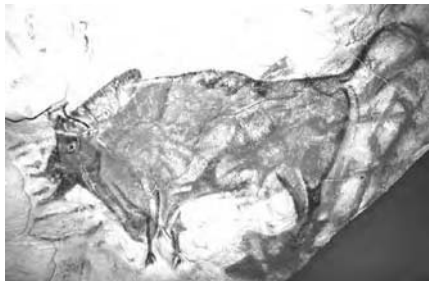
Guggenheim, Bilbao

There are Spanish arts that conform neatly to styles of certain periods and others that set off in an entirely new direction. Long after the Moors were expelled their styles continued to emerge, even as recently as the modernisme period of architecture at the turn of the 20th century. Cubism and Surrealism are both 'modern arts,' though each is founded on distinct motivations and techniques. If there is one underlying thread that connects Spanish art from its crude beginnings in the hands of the native Iberians to the found creations of the 21st century's Antonio Tápies, it must be the land. In it is a spirit of independence, a beauty and a history that informs and inspires Spanish artisans regardless of their ambitions.

■ Early Influences

At 25,000 years old, the polychromatic cave paintings of wild animals in the Altamira Caves of northern Spain are among the earliest and certainly the most accomplished on the Iberian Peninsula. Remnants of the Bronze Age stand in the *talayots* (defensive towers), *navetas* (funeral chambers) and *taulas* (altars) of Menorca. From the Iron Age there are the mysterious stone

bulls of Guisando in Ávila and the Iberian busts of the Dama de Elche and Dama de Baza. Early Celtic inhabitants are credited with the round fortresses of northern Spain and the Greeks with the ruins of Rohdes (Roses) and Emporion (Empúries). But in the early times it was the Romans who left the greatest lasting imprint on the peninsula by creating paved roads, bridges, aqueducts, baths, theaters and circuses. They were the first to extensively mine gold in what is modern day León and used it to create highly ornamented jewelry and to adorn their elaborate temples. In Mérida and Segovia the Roman heritage is particularly evident. In turn, the Visigoths would adopt classical forms and leave behind Spain's first churches in San Juan de Baños (Palencia) and San Pedro de la Nave (Zamora). Their successors would adorn the northern mountains of Spain with Pre-Romanesque architecture beginning in the eighth century. In these austere, blocky monuments, arches and ornate decorative motifs were incorporated, as seen in Asturias' churches of Santa María del Naranco and San Miguel de Lillo.



Altamira painting

■ The Moorish Influence

Inside La Mesquita

From the eighth century on, the Moors relied on oriental styles to create elaborate palaces and mosques supported by forests of horseshoe arches with vivid tiling, delicate plaster latticework, fountains, patios and lush gardens. As the Koran forbade the depiction of natural forms, the skilled Moorish craftsmen relied on spellbinding geometrical designs to embellish their monuments. Moorish *alcazabas* (fortresses) and *alcazares* (fortified palaces) survive throughout southern Spain, though often with later Christian additions. Paramount among them is La Mezquita of Córdoba and La Alhambra of Granada. Christians who lived under Muslim rule came to be known as Mozarabes and their art Mozarabic, a blend of western and oriental styles. During the 12th-14th centuries, Mudéjar architecture would emerge at the hands of the Moors who were permitted to live under Christian rule. Their creations were notable for elaborate designs in raised brick, paired windows divided by a central column, coffered wooden ceilings, and brightly colored tiles often inlaid in star patterns. The Jews would borrow these styles for their synagogues in Córdoba, Sevilla and Toledo. In Aragón, particularly in the city of Teruel, the Mudéjar style reached its peak.

■ The Catholic Influence

By the 11th century, French influences began to spread along the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain, giving rise to Romanesque architecture. These churches took the shape of a Latin cross with transepts and an apse and a side cloister. Round arched windows and galleries inspired by the Romans were common features, as were capitals and exquisite biblical carvings used as a way of teaching a largely illiterate public. The Romanesque took on different characteristics throughout the north and central regions of Spain and

many have since been renovated in later Gothic and Baroque styles. The most pristine remains of the Romanesque period survive throughout the Pyrenees Mountains in Navarra, Aragón, particularly in Cataluña's Valle de Boí. Romanesque paintings of the 12th century often took the form of frescoes and altar frontals with illustrated codices. The Frescoes of the Pantheon de San Isidro beneath León's Gothic cathedral are the greatest surviving Romanesque artworks.

■ Gothic

Sevilla Cathedral

As the 13th century signaled the end of the Dark Ages, Romanesque architecture was gradually replaced by the more advanced Gothic style. With better support attained through flying buttresses, cathedrals could be built taller and with more windows. Arches were peaked and stained glass as well as sculpture played an integral role in the look of these monuments. In its earliest applications, incomplete Romanesque structures in Ávila and Cuenca were completed in the Gothic style. The first purely Gothic cathedrals were built in Burgos and León, both with a decidedly French influence. Others incorporated subtle Moorish or Flemish accents. When the Gothic cathedral of Sevilla was built, it was heralded as the largest of its kind in the world. In the 15th and 16th centuries under the Catholic Monarchs, the cathedrals of Toledo and Granada would be built with a more severe emphasis on curves and vaulting. Gothic painters traditionally expended their efforts in adorning altarpieces.

What Part of the Church Was That?

- **Transept**: horizontal arm of the cross
- **Nave**: vertical arm of the cross
- **Altar**: point at which transept and nave meet
- **Choir stalls**: located beneath the altar in the nave
- **Apse**: extension of nave above the transept
- **Sepulcher**: subsurface burial tombs
- **Cloister**: arcaded square adjoining the church

■ Renaissance

At the end of 15th century the discovery of America and the influx of new riches heralded a transition to the Renaissance based on classical ideals of Greece and Rome. Exterior ornamentation became paramount and in short order the plateresque style had developed. Named for the rich ornamentation of silver filigree (it means literally "silversmith-like"), it consisted of intricately carved stone façades that expounded on the religious and metaphysical. Toledo's Hospice of Santa Cruz was the first such example but it was in Salamanca where the form was fully embraced, as seen in the façade of its university and throughout its buildings of the period. The ornate

plateresque style led to a toned-down architectural reaction. The palace of Carlos V in the Alhambra was built in the pure Italian Renaissance style. Similarly, the religious paintings of Pedro Berruguete (1450-1504) reflect the influence of Italian styles during the period. Juan de Herrera's San Lorenzo del Escorial built for Felipe II in the 16th century was an obvious austere reaction to the flashier Renaissance style. Felipe II had attracted the attention of the Cretan-born painter Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as El Greco (1541-1614), who hoped to earn a commission as court painter. Felipe was not taken with the artist's work, but El Greco found his way to Toledo, where he became the earliest master of the developing Golden Age.

■ Baroque

The ostentatious came into favor at the beginning of the 17th century as José de Churriguera gave rise to the Churrigueresque style, characterized by ornate façades adorned with shiny tiling, mirrors and loud colors. The palaces of Madrid and Aranjuez stand as the greatest testaments to this style. This was Spain's Golden Age, a period of riches, optimism and unparalleled artistic expression. Sevilla-born Diego Velazquez (1599-1660) would become Felipe IV's court painter and create the leading works of the period, when he wasn't dispatched to Italy acquiring works by Rubens and other preeminent European painters. His masterpieces, *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honor) and *Los Hilanderas* (The Spinners), would be followed by the works of José de Ribera (1591-1652), Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), Alonso Cano (1601-1667) and Bartolomé Estabán Murillo (1618-1682).

■ Neoclassicism

As the Bourbon dynasty firmly established itself in the 18th century, inviting French and Italian influences into the mix, architecture became notably conservative in appearance. The Prado Museum was one result of this period. Painters became increasingly interested in historical depictions, as Fransisco de Goya unleashed his brush expressively and with less of an emphasis on accuracy than sentimentality. His depictions of the royal family of Carlos IV have been likened to visual parodies. He depicted the horrors of the Napoleonic Invasion in his masterpieces, *El Dos de Mayo* and *El Tres de Mayo*, and later in life became increasingly absorbed with the macabre and morbid affairs of the soul in his Black Paintings. The excesses of Romanticism epitomized in the work of Goya caused a backlash as painters turned increasingly to the natural world and lighter subjects for inspiration. Rooted in French realism, its driving forces in Spain were Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923), Santiago Rusiñol (1861-1931), Aureliano de Beruete (1845-1912) and Ramon Casas (1866-1932).

El Dos de Mayo, Goya

■ Modernisme

The Industrial Revolution that shaped Barcelona in the 19th century created the wealth necessary for a new wave of artists to recognize their visions. The architects Antoni Gaudí, Lluís Domènech i Montaner and Josep Puig i Cadafalch were at the head of the Modernisme movements that corresponded with France's Art Nouveau. Structures began to take on organic shapes, with an emphasis on ornate floral décor, religious symbolism and inspiration from earlier Moorish and Gothic styles. Modernisme (*modernista* in Castilian Spanish) coincided with Cataluña's Renaixenca, a rebirth of culture in the realms of literature, politics and art. By the turn of the 20th century Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) had begun his Cubist phase. Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) became the bastard child of the Surrealism movement and Joan Miró (1893-1983) delved increasingly into the spatial reality of constellations. During this period the Generation of '98, a literary and cultural movement, developed through the writings of José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), Antonio Machado (1875-1939), Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) and others.

■ Post Modern

Rules are out the window. In the wake of war and Picasso, Spain's great living painters include Antonio Tápies, Jose Balmes and Miquel Barcelo. The sculptural instillations by Eduardo Chillida, who died in 2002, are now a promising feature of the new Spanish landscape and bold new buildings have lately arisen from humble foundations. Frank Gehry built his remarkable undulating titanium masterpiece the Guggenheim Museum in a now soot-free Bilbao next to the space-age footbridge Campo Volantin designed by Santiago Calatrava. Once Calatrava's sleek steel and glass City of Science Museum and Planetarium is completed in Valencia, Spain will have yet another reason to continue recreating itself throughout the 21st century.

Going Metric

To make your travels in this region a little easier, we have provided the following chart that shows metric equivalets for the measurements you are familiar with.

GENERAL MEASUREMENTS

1 kilometer = .6124 miles

1 mile = 1.6093 kilometers

1 foot = .304 meters

1 inch = 2.54 centimeters

1 square mile = 2.59 square kilometers

1 pound = .4536 kilograms

1 ounce = 28.35 grams

1 imperial gallon = 4.5459 liters

1 US gallon = 3.7854 liters

1 quart = .94635 liters

TEMPERATURES

For Fahrenheit: Multiply Centigrade figure by 1.8 and add 32.

For Centigrade: Subtract 32 from Fahrenheit figure and divide by 1.8.

Centigrade	Fahrenheit
40°	104°
35°	95°
30°	86°
25°	77°
20°	64°
15°	59°
10°	50°

Travel & Living Information

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."
Augustine, 354-430 AD

■ When to Go

The most favorable time to travel in Spain is from mid-April through early July and then in September and October. These are periods of mostly mild temperatures across the country when the tourist season has not yet hit its peak in the simmering summer months. Outdoor adventure travel is also in full swing during these months, as many of the guide services close during the winter. Regardless, good weather is available almost all year round for those willing and able to seek it out and in the Canary Islands, where the weather is almost always sunny. In winter, stretches of the southern coast remain fairly comfortable, while northern Spain is a suitable retreat during the dog days of summer. If it is celebration you seek, the biggest and best festivals begin with Semana Santa in the week prior to Easter and run through October.

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■ What to Wear

As a broad rule, travel in winter months and at high altitudes requires that you pack for maximum coverage and minimum weight. You'll want a coat (a windbreaker coupled with a fleece is the lightest option, though it may not be warm enough in the mountains or stylish enough if the nightlife scene is what you seek), thermal underwear, a raincoat during spring (or if you're in the north) and layered winter clothing. Within many cities in summer the air can be chilly at night or in the shade, so plan accordingly. On the coasts, beach attire and lots of sunscreen is the norm among tourists. You aren't likely, however, to see Spaniards in the beach towns going about their daily business wearing shorts, a flowery shirt and flip-flops (unless they work or live for the beach and water). So be advised, you might catch a few dirty looks from disapproving Spanish señoras.

■ Currency

The currency of Spain is the euro (€), so if you arrive from one of the other EU States (apart from the UK) the currency is the same. There are 100 cents to €1 and coins are in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, as well as €1 and 2. Notes are in denominations of €5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500. As of this writing, $1 = €.82 or €1 = $1.21.

The Best of Spain

■ Ten Sights & Sensations

Architectural Wonders of Gaudí's Barcelona

At the forefront of 19th-century Modernisme was Anton Gaudí, an architect who used the city of Barcelona as the medium for his creations. Start at the undulating Casa Mila, Gaudí's former home and now a museum of his work. Follow the walking tour throughout Gaudí's Barcelona, which includes the whimsical Parc Güell and the artist's most famous work, the Sagrada Familia. See pages 358 ff.

The Alhambra and Albaicín of Granada

No trip to Spain is complete without a trek to Granada's Moorish marvel, the Alhambra. An earthen-colored castle of palaces and gardens built under the Nazari Dynasty in the 14th century, the Alhambra was the site of the Moors' final stand in 1492 when this, the last Arab city, fell to the Christians. See page 302.

The Guggenheim of Bilbao

Architect Frank Gehry's daring and controversial titanium masterpiece straddles the Nervion River in the industrial city of Bilbao and is home to a revolving collection of notable 20th-century avant-garde art, including works by Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Cezanne, Picasso, Warhol and Pollock. See page 498.

Disco in Ibiza

Uninhibited is the first word that comes to mind when contemplating a trip to the Balearic Island of Ibiza. There is a reason why E! and MTV have shot so many exploitative features on this place. The good times, though, don't come cheap. See page 608.

The Museo Del Prado in Madrid

Renowned as the largest art gallery in the world, with over 8,600 paintings and sculptures (of which there is room to show only a fraction). See page 93.

El Greco's Toledo

Formerly Spain's capital during the rule of the Visigoths, many proclaim Toledo as El Greco's city. His most famous paintings, *Burial of the Count Orgaz* and *View and Plan of Toledo*, pay homage to his adopted home. Few Spanish towns are so well preserved in their historical architecture. See page 210.

Flamenco Music in Andalucía

Avoid the touristy, staged flamenco shows and flamenco cafés that lack what the Spanish call *duende*. Real flamenco echoes throughout the cities of Andalucía in places, and at times, you would least expect it. The best opportunities to see good flamenco are in the caves of Granada and at flamenco festivals during the summer, as well as at fairs (*ferias*) held during the spring, summer and early fall. Or just follow the sounds of Spanish guitar, rhythmic clapping, and soulful melodies that ring in your ears around midnight. See page 245.

Dalí's Mind-Bending Work in Figueres

Figueres is full of illusions and surprises, the legacy of its late native son, artist Salvador Dalí. Interpret his surrealistic art and maybe even lose your mind at The Dalí Theatre Museum, the self-proclaimed "largest surrealist object in the world." See page 408.

La Mezquita of Córdoba

All streets in Córdoba seem to converge on La Mezquita, an eighth-century Moorish mosque that, after several additions, now stands as one of the largest in the Islamic world. See page 256.

Arabic Baths

The centuries-old Baños Arabes just below the Alhambra in Granada are some of the last operating baths in Spain. Amidst mesmerizing Arabic melodies and spicy incense, tourists and Spaniards alike indulge their senses with warm mineral baths, chilling mountain pools and sedating massages. A typical treatment costs about 8€ and could last as long as two hours. See page 310.

The Great Outdoors

Canyoning the Sierra de Guara

Officially recognized as the birthplace of canyoning, a sport wildly popular throughout Europe, the Sierra de Guara in the Southern Pyrenees is the place to do it. See page 433.

Snow Skiing the Sierra Nevada

Spain has six different zones for winter sports, but the setting of the Sierra Nevada Mountains make it the most unforgettable destination for skiing. See page 317.

Kitesurfing in Tárifa

Famed for its hellacious winds, Tárifa is another of Spain's world-renowned spots. Here, windsurfing and kiteboarding are the sports of choice. See page 272.

Climbing El Chorro

The towering limestone walls and precarious overhangs of El Chorro offer some of the best crags in Spain. Lourdes is a climber's dream and, once at the top, the view of sprawling lakes and beaches below is overwhelming. See page 284.

Diving in the Medes

The special biological conditions of the Medes Islands have fostered one of the best spots for scuba diving in Spain. Vibrant sea fans, red corral, resident groupers of immense size, schools of sardines and anchovies attract jacks, bonito, bass and barracuda, among other marine life. See page 407.

Hiking Picos de Europa

Nestled among the highest peaks of the Cantabrian range just south of the Bay of Biscay are trails of unequaled natural beauty. These treks cross peaks, gorges and serene lakes in a landscape teeming with wildlife. See page 540.

Biking the Camino de Santiago Pilgrim's Route

Get out of the car and infiltrate the Spanish culture on a bike ride along the Camino de Santiago Pilgrim's route in the Galician hills. Along the way you will pass the same Gothic cathedrals, Romanesque monasteries, and charming hamlets that 11 centuries of pilgrims have before you. See page 560 ff.

Surfing Galicia's Pantín Beach

Waves are good enough here to host an annual surfing circuit event called the "Pantín Classico." Pantin is less encumbered by territorial locals or hordes of tourists than most popular surfs. See page 583.

Birding the Coto Doñana

Harboring Europe's most significant wetlands, Doñana is Spain's largest wildlife preserve. This precious eco-system maintains vast wetlands, dry mountain coastal regions and a wealth of flyers including raptors, pink flamingos and golden eagles. See page 251.

Adventures

In Spain the multi-adventure guide companies outnumber the specialty services that cater to sports like paragliding and rock climbing. That is not to say that the companies offering paragliding and rock climbing as well as canyoning, whitewater rafting, caving, scuba diving and rappelling have less experienced guides. In most cases these companies are larger and employ guides that specialize in specific sports. When contemplating such a trip, call one of the guides mentioned in this book ahead of time. In summer, many companies are booked up weeks ahead. The following is a short list with descriptions of the major adventure activities practiced in Spain.

■ On Land

Hiking (*senderismo*, *recorridos*): With its natural parks, mountains and vast expanses of open country, hikers at all levels will find suitable trails in virtually every corner of the country. Some have great historical significance, while others are undertaken simply for the beauty of the landscape or to observe wildlife. The long-distance trails in Spain are designated as GRs (*senderos de gran recorrido*) and can run hundreds of miles. There are almost 200 of these routes, each designated by white and red marks. Many, but not all, are signposted with varying degrees of efficiency. The most frequented of these include the **GR 1** running across the north of Spain from Cataluña to Galicia; the **GR 92** that spans the Mediterranean coast from Cataluña to Gibraltar in Andalucía; the **GR 99**, following the course of the Río Ebro from its headwaters in the mountains of Cantabría to its Mediterranean delta in Cataluña; the **GR 100** along the Roman silver route south from Asturias to Andalucía; the **GR 142** through the villages of Las Alpujarras in Granada's Sierra Nevada; and the **GR 65**, which begins in Navarra and runs through La Rioja and Castilla y León en route to western Galicia. This last route corresponds to Spain's most famous hiking trail, the **Camino de Santiago**, which pilgrims have walked for over 1,000 years to pay tribute to the relics of the Apostle St. James (Santiago) in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It is an admirable undertaking and one that can last up to 4½ weeks. Shorter

paths, designated PRs (*senderos de pequeño recorrido*), are usually accomplishable in a day and marked with white and yellow bands.

Often paths, particularly in the natural parks, don't fall under either of these headings but may be signposted as well or better than the GRs and PRs. Hiking is particularly rewarding in the Doñana wetlands of Andalucía. Similarly, the national parks of Ordesa and Aigüestortes in the Pyrenees Mountains and the Picos de Europa in the Cordillera Cantábrica offer exceptional opportunities to explore Spain's prettiest mountain landscapes. In many cases mountain *refugios* offer shelter and a bed for multiple-night treks. But great hikes are also available just a short trip away from cities or villages. The Canary and Balearic islands possess countless trails, many of which lead through uninhabited spaces along gorgeous coastal cliffs or through wild volcanic landscapes. Most tourist boards and nearly all natural park visitor centers offer detailed pamphlets or books on the major hikes. To narrow the scope into something manageable, the major trails are indicated within the body of this book.

Biking (*bicicleta todoterreno*): Touring on a bicycle is becoming increasingly popular as package guide companies rush to sign up hundreds of curious tourists seduced by the prospect of getting up close and personal with popular historical routes. The Camino de Santiago, the hills and valleys of Las Alpujarras and the Ruta de la Plata (Roman silver route) across the meseta are three such routes. These tours can be very costly, however, not to mention limiting. With a little planning and saddlebags, you can just as easily embark on your own two-wheeled tour for a fraction of the cost.

Off-road trails are prevalent in the mountains and rural confines, but rarely marked and often restricted to hikers or off-limits for conservation reasons. Arrangements can be made to rent bikes for extended periods in Madrid and Barcelona. The rental companies are mentioned in their respective sections; costs vary, but expect to pay around 75-100€ per week and more for a dual-shock bike; most of these businesses can provide self-guided tourist itineraries as well. Most major tourist destinations have at least one bike rental shop and these usually charge by the hour or day. The staff on hand will more than likely be knowledgeable about the surrounding trails, and tourist offices (which are everywhere) can supply further information on trails and where to acquire bikes. Always take a rental bike for a test spin to check the tires, the gears and the brakes. Some of these shops are notoriously lax in maintaining their equipment. Another good resource is the **Spanish Biking Federation** (Real Federación Española de Ciclismo, C/ Ferraz 16, 28008 Madrid, ☎ 91 540 08 41, fax 91 542 03 41, www.rfec.com).

Rock Climbing (*escalada*): The five major mountain chains – the Pyrenees, Cordillera Cantábrica, Sistema Iberico, Sistema Central and Sistema Bética – offer innumerable bolted routes with practically every grade of difficulty represented. Of course, the highest peaks, those over 3,000 m (9,850 feet), are irresistible to experienced climbers, with **Mulhacén** (3,478 m/11,408 feet), Spain's highest mainland peak, the most coveted summit. Apart from the major mountain chains, two other destinations enjoy worldwide reputations among climbers: the chasms of **El Chorro** in the Málaga province of Andalucía and the serrated crags of **Montserrat** outside Barcelona in Cataluña. Spanish climbers use the French climbing scale rather than the American scale (listed in parentheses) to grade their routes (from least to

most difficult): 2 (5.2-5.3), 3 (5.4), 4 (5.5), 5a (5.6), 5b (5.8), 5c (5.9), 6a (5.10b-5.10c), 6b (5.10d-5.11b), 6c (5.11c), 7a (5.11d-5.12a), 7b (5.12b), 7c (5.12c), 7c+ (5.13a), 8a (5.13c), 8b+ (5.14a), 8c, 8c+ and 9a. For information or climbing connections in Spain, contact the **Federación Española de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada** (C/ Floridablanca 15, 08015 Barcelona, ☎ 93 426 42 67, fax 93 426 33 87, www.fedme.es).

Canyoning (*descenso de cañones*): Swimming, sliding, jumping, trekking, abseiling – it's all incorporated in the popular European craze known as canyoning. Some believe the sport was invented in Spain, though the Swiss make the same claim. Regardless, where a river has cut a deep swath through the landscape it is possible to practice this sport, though you'll need the necessary ropes, harnesses, carabiners and other abseiling equipment, not to mention non-slip water boots, a helmet, life jacket and usually a wetsuit. Without experience, it is a far wiser choice to sign on with an experienced guide service and these are everywhere that canyoning is practiced with regularity. Popular destinations are mentioned in the body of this book, including numerous valleys of the Pyrenees and the Picos de Europa and the best spot of all, the **Parque Natural de la Sierra y los Cañones de Guara**.

Spelunking/Caving (*espeleología*): Spain is riddled with grottos, many of which were known to prehistoric Iberian inhabitants, who adorned them with crude paintings; others were later discovered by bandits who used them as hideouts and to stash treasure hordes. They may stretch for miles just beneath the surface as the result of subterranean rivers or sink hundreds of yards below the earth. Stalactites, stalagmites and underground pools are but a few of their hidden features. Spelunking in Spain can be immensely rewarding, or it can be terribly disappointing. Many of the major caves, especially those of historical interest, are either closed or limited in the number of visitors that can enter them on a daily basis. If you have no love of history or tales from long ago, exploring these caves may be a wasted effort as you'll be made to follow a guide swinging a gas lantern the entire time. Others are open without restrictions, but they're usually more difficult to locate. Parts of the Serranía de Ronda in Andalucía, the Picos de Europa along the Bay of Biscay and the Sierra de Gudar near Teruel in Aragón harbor caves that are less touristed and thus less restricted. In any case, contact the Spanish Spelunking Association ahead of time to get the lowdown on regulations and the many destinations that aren't mentioned in this, or any, guidebook! (**Federación Española de Espeleología**, C/ Ayala 160, 28009 Madrid, ☎ 91 309 36 74, fax 91 309 15 99).

Birdwatching (*observación de pajaros)*: Spain is a crucial staging point for birds in their yearly migrations. Hundreds of species flock to breed and feed in the wetlands of the **Parque Nacional de Doñana** on Spain's southern Atlantic coast and the **Tablas de Daimiel** in La Mancha, the lagoons of **La Albufera** near Valencia and the **Delta del Ebro** north of it. The best times to birdwatch are during the spring months, when these birds swoop up from Africa, and again in the fall when they return from northern Europe. The visitor centers at each of these parks maintain trail maps and charts pointing out the best hides throughout the year. At the Parque Nacional de Doñana it is necessary to hire a guide to access the central areas of the park. Though not difficult, arrangements will need to be made in advance. Contact information is listed in the respective sections of this book.

Four-Wheeling/Off-Road Driving (*quads / rutas en vehículo todoterreno*): A distinction should be made between the mud-slinging free-for-all of ATV four-wheeling and off-road touring in SUVs. The former is popular along the coast and almost always practiced on private lands. It's a fun way to blow off steam, see some gorgeous views and get real dirty. The latter is usually run by guides experienced in flora and fauna observation. Most notably, parks rely on SUVs as the best way to reach places off the beaten path while gleaning knowledge of the wildlife.

Horseback Riding (*rutas a caballo*): The Spaniards have a long equestrian tradition without which we in the Americas might have had to wait a few more hundred years to get horses of our own. Stables are common in the mountains and rural spaces. The horses are sometimes old and haggard; they aren't intended for competitions or barrel racing, but for leisurely trots through the countryside. The horseman responsible for these stables will rarely rent just one horse and will never send them off without joining along. Solo travelers can often join larger groups or, if the money is right and the season slow, convince the guide to make a private tour. These guides make their money from tours that may last an afternoon or a week at a time. Trust these men; they know the land and have a pretty good idea of what you'll want to see. A word of advice, though. On Spain's flat and arid central plateau, horseback riding often consists of making a loop around a bleak, private ranch. In the valleys and along the fringes of natural parks, by contrast, riding is much more rewarding. Further information is available through the **Real Federación Hípica Española** (Plaza del Marqués de Salamanca 2, 28006 Madrid, ☎ 91 577 78 92, fax 91 575 07 70, www.rfhe.com).

■ On Water

Surfing (*surfear*): While the Mediterranean coast occasionally enjoys surfable swells, Spain's Atlantic coast is what it's all about. **La Playa El Palmar** in Andalucía's Cádiz province has the nastiest surf on the southern Atlantic coast. In the north, Galicia's **Playa Pantín** in the Ría (estuary) de Cedeira is world-renowned and host to an international surfing competition each year. Moving east into Asturias, **Playa San Antolin**, **Playa de Ribadisella** and the challenging reef break of **El Mongol** are the prime surfing attractions. In Cantábria, seek out the beaches of **Somo** and **El Sardinero** around the city of Santander. The surf gets better in the País Vasco. San Sebastián offers the **Playa de Zurriola** (sometimes called the Playa de Gros) and nearby the **Playa de Zarautz**, which also host an annual international surfing competition. Near Bilbao, the **Playa Mundaka** is rife with surfers.

Windsurfing & Kiteboarding (*windsurf & kite surf*): **Tárifa**, Europe's southernmost city, is also its windiest and, as a result, a major draw to windsurfers and kiteboarders. It is the best destination to practice the sport in Spain and one of the best in the world, attracting clouds of sails and yearly international competitions. Windsurfing, while still popular, has lost much of its allure as more and more people take up the new sport of kiteboarding and try in vain to dump their clunky old equipment. Flying off waves into spins and flips is quite appealing. It can also be dangerous for novices whose chutes get caught in a draft, sending them slamming into the bank, or worse, a tree. Yada yada yada. Tárifa is the best, but there are plenty of other places to enjoy. Off the Mediterranean coast windsurfers work most city spots. Barce-

lona, Valencia and Tarragona all have a devoted group. The wind off the coast of the town of **L'Escala** on the Costa Brava is handy. In the northwest, the **Praia da Frouxeira** in Galicia's Ría de Cedeira (a ría is an estuary) is also a main windsurfing and kiteboarding locale.

Sailing (*vela*): The major port cities along the Spanish coast almost always have at least one sailing school and numerous companies that charter sailboats for private excursions. Prices range from a few hundred to thousands of dollars per day. In the summertime, charter boats can be hard to come by. Advance arrangements can be made by contacting the port phone numbers or one of the charter companies listed in the body of this book. Even in the high season there are plenty of mariners with their own boats but little money to keep them docked. Walk around the port, ask a few questions, and more than likely you'll be able to hook up with a private owner who would be more than happy to spend a few days at sea and charge far less than the big boys. Further information can be had by contacting the **Real Federación Española de Vela** (C/ Luis de Salazar 9, 28002 Madrid, ☎ 91 519 50 08, fax 91 416 45 04, www.rfev.es)

Rafting, Canoeing, Kayaking & Hydrospeed (*rafting, piragüismo, kayak & hydrospeed*): Rivers and mountains are everywhere in Spain but whitewater is hard to come by outside of the Pyrenees mountains. Cataluña's **Río Noguera** is the wildest in the country, with grades up to IV during the springtime. In Aragón the **Ríos Esera**, **Ara**, **Gallego** and **Cinca** have stretches of whitewater and rafting companies ready to float you down them. Kayaking and hydrospeed (water tobogganing) are also practiced in these rivers. In Asturias, the stretch of the **Río Sella** between Arriondas on the outskirts of the Picos de Europa and Ribadesela on the Atlantic coast is a prime canoeing destination. Each year in August these villages host a three-day canoe festival highlighted by the Descenso del Sella, a 17-km/11-mile race in which over a thousand canoers vie for a year's worth of bragging rights.

Fishing (*pesca*): Keep your fly down and your hopes up. Inland fishing is not as good as it was in Hemingway's day, but it is enjoying a rebound thanks to decreasing pollution and increasing regulations. To fish Spain's rivers and lakes you'll need to buy a two-week permit (*permiso de pesca*) either at the Delegación Agencia Medio Ambiente office located in every provincial capital, at the local *ayuntamiento* (city hall) or, in some cases, at campgrounds. The small fishing village of **El Bosque** in the Cádiz province of Andalucía survives because of its trout fishing reputation. Though its fish farm is off-limits, the nearby streams are well stocked with common trout and some of the restaurants in town will even prepare your catch. The rivers of the Picos de Europa harbor Europe's southernmost salmon population, though throughout the major mountain chains you'll be able to catch a common trout with a little patience. Coastal and deep-sea fishing requires a separate maritime license. These can be purchased in the provincial capital offices of the Delegación Provincial de la Conserjeria de Agricultura y Pesca. Contact the **Federación Española de Pesca** (C/ Navas de Tolosa 3, Madrid, ☎ 91 532 83 53) for information. Bring your own equipment as fly shops are few and far between.

Scuba Diving (*buceo*): Spanish dive shops honor both NAUI and PADI certifications and, depending on their affiliations, offer certifications in these

and others, including SSI and CMAS. While not as thrilling as the ocean, diving in the Mediterranean does have its perks. Ancient shipwrecks are common, currents are usually mild to nonexistent and, in places around the Balearic Islands and the Illes Medes off the Costa Brava, the marine life is exceptional. The fish are larger and more abundant off Spain's northern Atlantic coast and dive shops are numerous. Needless to say, the Canary Islands offer the best diving in the country. With an open-water certification, expect to pay around 30€ per dive. Courses start at 150€ and go up from there. Further information is available by contacting the **Federación Española de Actividades Subacuáticas** (C/ Santaló 15, 08021 Barcelona, ☎ 93 200 67 69, fax 93 241 16 80, www.fedas.es).

■ On Snow & Ice

Downhill Skiing & Snowboarding: Spain has over 20 ski resorts with conditions ranging from mud and slush to ice to powder that is almost as good as the French and Swiss Alps to the north – almost. Each of Spain's five major mountain ranges have ski resorts, though the best are located in the Aragón and Catalan Pyrenees. Foremost among them are the ritzy **Baqueira/Beret**, **Masella**, **Boí Taül** and **La Molina**. In Andalucía the Sierra Nevada, Europe's southernmost ski resort, is famed for its sunny weather and equipped with great facilities since it hosted the 1996 World Skiing Championship. In the Sistema Central north of Madrid the two small resorts get very crowded on the weekends and suffer from undependable snow fall. This is the case throughout the country, though many of the larger ski resorts have ramped up their snow-making abilities to counteract a fussy mother nature. Other resorts are located in the Cordillera Cantábrica in northwestern Spain and the Sistema Ibérico in the east, but they are small and only the locals seem to appreciate them. British holiday skiing packages have come into favor in the Pyrenees of late, adding to the crowds, which makes it more difficult to rent equipment and find hotel space. Still, with the exception of Spanish holidays, acquiring lift passes, equipment and hotel rooms is usually not a problem with a bit of advance planning. Skiing is cheaper in Spain than it is in the Alps or the States, with an average lift ticket (*abono*) costing 25€ and full equipment under 20€. Spanish resorts are open to snowboarders and the largest ones have recently created half-pipes. Slopes are broken down into four categories: green (*verdes*) for beginners; blues (*azules*) for intermediates; reds (*rojos*) for advanced; and blacks (*negros*) for the hot shots.

Cross-Country Skiing (*esquí de fondo o nórdico*): The majority of Spanish ski resorts maintain cross-country skiing circuits (*fondos*) in the surrounding flats. Equipment can be rented from the shops in the base villages. The main cross-country skiing destinations are **Candanchú** in Aragón with over 60 km (37 miles) of maintained track; **Baqueira-Beret** in Cataluña with 29 km (18 miles); and **Masella** in Cataluña with 18 km (11 miles). Further information is available later in this book and through the **Real Federación de Española de Deportes de Invierno** (C/ Arroyofresno, chalet 3-A, 28035 Madrid, ☎ 91 376 99 30, fax 91 376 99 31, secretario@rfedi.es).

■ In the Air

Paragliding & Hang Gliding (*parapente*): Spain has many peaks over 3,000 m (9,000 feet), perfect for launching into the thermals with a paraglide or hang glide. From the peaks of the Sierra Nevada a flight allows views of the mountains, valleys and the Mediterranean just to the south. Flyers use a number of areas as launch zones, one of the most frequented being the control tower of **Borreguiles**. In the Sierra de Gredos south of Ávila, Piedrahita serves as a base village for the nearby launch of **Puerta de la Peña Negra**. In the Aragón Pyrenees, the area to the north the village of **Castejon de Sos** is frequented by flyers. Without experience or your own equipment, guide services in these areas and others require tandem flights with an experienced pilot. These cost between 40-50€ per. Arrangements are best made in advance. Questions can be directed to the **Real Federación Aeronáutico Española** (Ctra de la Fortuna s/n, edificio RACE, 28044 Madrid, ☎ 91 508 29 50, fax 91 511 03 10, www.sportec.com/www/fae/main)

Ballooning (*globo aerostático*): A relatively tame adventure in the right hands, hot air ballooning has come into favor with local Spanish tourism boards as a way of attracting tourists while offering a different view of their cities. In Aranjuez and Sevilla these short flights are easy to join and relatively affordable at 50€. A number of private owners run longer flights on the outskirts of cities and in the country that cost upwards of 150€. Lunch is usually included, as is the champagne party that awaits you upon touchdown.

Choice Itineraries

The following are a few suggested routes based on the amount of time one has to spend on the peninsula. In a week's time one could just as easily stay in Madrid and still see only a fraction of the city, or make short daytrips to surrounding villages like Aranjuez and San Lorenzo del Escorial. Virtually every major Spanish city is within an hour's drive of countless interesting places, from beaches, to traditional villages, mountains, rivers and on and on and on.

■ One Week

The High Points

Follow a southwest beeline from cosmopolitan Barcelona to Andalucían Sevilla. Spain's most European city will give way to the bustling, official air of Madrid along the way. Hit up its museums and pass through Toledo en route to the rich Moorish treasures of Sevilla.

Andalucían Odyssey

From Madrid, hit the road to Córdoba and tour its mosques. Continue to Sevilla, the largest city in Andalucía, and from there head south to Cádiz, Europe's oldest city. Then go west through Ronda en route to Granada and its Alhambra and Albaicín.

A Green Tour of Atlantic Spain

Pass through the Rioja region and sample its wines before heading to lovely San Sebastián with hundreds of lively pintxo bars and a rare beach setting. Drive west for a few hours to Bilbao to see the Guggenheim Museum and from there follow the Atlantic coastline through Cantabría to reach Asturias' collection of stunning Pre-Romanesque churches. Galicia, with its rich Celtic history, great seafood, lush estuaries and the holy shrine of St. James, are just a few hours farther west.

■ Up to a Month

Spread Your Wings

In this amount of time you can see many of Spain's major attractions and in a full month visit Portugal and Morocco. To accomplish this you'll need a rental car. Taking the train is fun and relaxing, but it also leaves you at the mercy of timetables. Consider traveling counterclockwise: head northwest from Madrid to the Atlantic Coast. Pass through San Sebastián, Bilbao and over to Galicia before busting it south to Lisbon, Portugal. It will take you six hours to get down to Córdoba and Sevilla from Lisbon, but the drive and the radical changes in culture are worth it. At the Straight of Gibraltar, cross over into Morocco (and, if time permits, pass on by Tangiers for something deeper). Once you return, follow the Mediterranean Coast through Granada, then Valencia and, finally, Barcelona.

Adventurer's Trail

The wildest spaces in Spain are in its Pyrenees Mountains. A week or even a month isn't enough to sample more than a fraction of the hiking and mountain biking trails, the whitewater rafting, fishing, paragliding and snow-skiing, with the Romanesque churches that make this part of Spain unique. Surfers and coastal junkies should head north to the coastlines of San Sebastián or, even better, south to Cádiz. From Cádiz, drive east along the still relatively unspoiled southern Atlantic Coast. Terrific surf is along the way and Tárifa awaits just an hour away; it's a hip town with a lively scene in its old quarter and some of the best windsurfing and kiteboarding conditions in the world.

The Anti-Tourist Tourist's Route

Extremadura is often passed by, despite its lovely scenery and friendly people who, unlike their neighbors in Andalucía, aren't accustomed to hosting thousands of tourists each day. This is the land of the conquistadors and, while their hometowns of Cáceres and Trujillo and the pilgrimage destination of Guadalupe do see a fair share of tourists, these are tourists who know what they're up to. Head west from Madrid and enter Extremadura from the north, making a stop in the Parque Natural de Monfragüe. Continue to Cáceres and then head east to Trujillo and Guadalupe beyond that. Finally, turn southwest to reach Mérida, with its evocative Roman ruins.

Getting Here & Getting Around

"The dogs may bark, but the caravan goes on." Old Arab proverb

■ By Plane

The earlier you begin perusing the newspapers' Sunday travel sections, browsing the Internet or phoning the travel agencies, the easier it will be to score a deal and avoid last-minute worries and rate hikes. Try price-shopping the Internet wholesalers initially, such as **priceline.com**, **travelocity.com**, **orbitz.com** and **hotwire.com**. Priceline.com is the only one of these that requires a credit card commitment to purchase if your bid is accepted. So it's better to check the other sites first, to scan their available flights and pricing without getting locked in to buy. But plan ahead, since most tickets, especially the cheaper ones, must be purchased at least 15 and often 30 or more days in advance. Students and travelers under 25 can also take advantage of the discount student travel agencies

such as **STA** *(☎ 800 781 4040)* or **Council Travel** *(☎ 800 2COUNCIL)*. These offer insurance and an international ID card good for some discounts abroad if you pay a small additional fee.

The easier – although generally more expensive – route is to call the airlines that regularly offer direct flights to Spain and simply book the ticket, which will most likely land you, depending on your choice, in Madrid, Barcelona or Málaga. These include **Iberia Airlines** *(☎ 800-772-4642; www.iberia.com)*; **Air Europa** *(☎ 888-238-7672; www.air-europa.com)*; **Air Plus Comet** *(☎ 877-999-7587; www.aircomet.com)*; **US Airways** *(☎ 800-428-4322; www.usairways.com)*; **American Airlines** *(☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com)*; **Continental** *(☎ 800-231-0856; www.continental.com)*; and **Delta Airlines** *(☎ 800-241-4141; www.delta.com)*.

Domestic flights within Spain are hosted by **Air Europa**, **Iberia Airlines** and **SpanAir** (which offers "air passes" allowing you to visit different Spanish cities for the one price; ☎ *902-40-15-01*); these can be booked either through your transatlantic carrier or, if you are already in Spain, through one of the many travel agencies (*viajes*). Discounts for these flights are numerous and can include up to 25% off round-trip flights for travelers under the age of 22 or over 63, as well as reduced rates for flights after 11 pm.

As the bus and train system is cheap and efficient, it is a bit of overkill to fly within Spain unless you intend to visit the islands. Good deals on charter flights to the Balearics are available out of Barcelona, Valencia, and Alicante. Though ferries run regularly and are somewhat cheaper, flying may be preferable (particularly to the Canaries) for the amount of time saved. The most affordable flights to these islands generally depart out of Málaga.

Airport Connections

Both Barcelona and Madrid airports are connected to the cities by the Metro. Additionally, El Prat Airport (Barcelona) has a train service from the airport to the city's main train station that runs every 30 minutes, while Barajas Airport (Madrid) has a bus service linking the airport with various districts. Every 30 minutes, Málaga Airport offers a train ride to Málaga's main station as well as to Fuengirola and Torremolinos. In Valencia there is an hourly train service from Manises Airport to Valencia Norte train station. The taxi is always an alternative.

■ By Train

Train passes are cheaper than elsewhere in Western Europe, but there are some reasons for that. The network was once hindered by an antiquated track system that did not fit Europe's predominant gauge. Thus, trains are often slower here and lack the extensive network one might expect of a European country (the system is, however, *slowly* being improved and many rapid services are available between major cities). You can get to and from most cities and towns by riding the rails, but you'll have to use the bus system to bridge the gaps.

The national train system is **RENFE**, Red Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Españoles *(☎ 904 24 02 02, www.renfe.es)*. The best lines branch out from Madrid's two main stations, the main **Atocha** station just south of the city center, and the **Chamartín**, a smaller station to the north. Most train stations have a long-distance train office and a regional train office, each with

their own information desk and ticket booths. Timetables of departures (*salidas*) and arrivals (*llegadas*) are posted at the stations, with the days of the week abbreviated (LMXJVSD), beginning with Monday. As with the airports and most bus stations, luggage lockers are available and charge per day. Overnight sleeping accommodations cost extra, though this is somewhat offset by the reduced rates on overnight rides; for routes greater than 400 km (248 miles), reservations (which cost an additional fee) are required.

Types of Trains

The oft-touted **AVE** is a high-speed train that travels only between Madrid and Sevilla, with stops in Córdoba, in a little over two hours. **Talgo** and its variants are the fastest and most expensive (read: fully air-conditioned and furnished) trains, with routes from Madrid to Málaga (under four hours), Madrid to Cádiz (four hours and 45 minutes) as well as routes to other, mostly southern destinations. Other modern trains include the **Euromed**, which covers the Barcelona-Valencia-Alicante route in four hours and 35 minutes, and the **Alaris**, running between Madrid and Valencia (three hours and 30 minutes). **Cercania** are commuter trains restricted to particular regions.

More lavish sightseeing trains include the **Al Andalus Express**, hyped as one of Europe's most elegant trains, with fully-restored classic cars offering five-star accommodations. This line criss-crosses southern Spain, and trips can be booked in the US through **Marketing Ahead** *(☎ 800-223-1356)*, **Sun Holidays** *(☎ 800-422-8000)* and **EC Tours** *(☎ 800-777-7246)*. **El Transcantabrico**, also of the sightseeing genre, courses through the northwestern coastal region known as Green Spain, from San Sebastián to Santiago de Compostela. For reservations, contact **Marketing Ahead**, **Conference Travel Int'l** *(☎ 800-527-4852)* or **EC Tours**.

Passes

If you don't plan to buy train passes (and it's recommended you buy them ahead of time so as to enjoy the discount given to foreigners), you can use RENFE's US affiliate, **Iberojet** *(☎ 800-222-8383)*, or choose from an assortment of passes suited to the traveling preferences of non-Europeans available through **RENFE** (www.renfe.es), **Der Travel Service** *(☎ 800-782-2424)* or **Rail Europe** *(☎ 800-438-7245; www.eurail.com)*. Once in Spain, travelers under age 26 can buy cheap passes called "Voyages Wasteel's" or "Billet International de Jeunnesse" at the stations. It is important to have your pass validated prior to your first train trip (occasionally, you will get lucky and your pass won't be punched). Also, with any Eurail pass, groups of six or more receive up to 30% off. Children under four travel free and children between four and 11 receive a 50% discount. Cheaper "Saver Passes" are available for two or more people traveling together.

■ By Bus

Where mopeds and taxis rule the inner-city streets, buses are king of the open road. They are modern and enjoy the most extensive transportation networks with the most economical prices, though you'll have to occasionally endure loud conversation, smoking and no bathroom. The buses do, however, tend to stop every so often at cheap little restaurants along the way.

> **Tip:** Stops for bathrooms may be reduced during holidays and in mountains and it's always a good idea to keep an eye on your bag, resting vulnerably in the open storage compartment below, until the doors have been shut.

There is no national bus service in Spain. Private companies branch out from stations (*estacións de autobus*) to serve the various regions. Tickets and information on bus routes between cities can be found at bus terminals, where routes and timetables are posted. You should buy tickets in advance for long trips and during tourist season. One-way tickets can be purchased on the buses (though for the most popular routes, these can sell out). Strips of 10 tickets (*billetes bonabus*) can be purchased in advance from tobacco shops (*estancos*). For regular routes, the ticket you buy is only for the next bus leaving and cannot be purchased in advance, which can sometimes be an inconvenience.

Some Bus Pass Options

Busabout *(☎ 020-79 50 1661, www.busabout.com)* offers passes valid for up to seven months travel between Western European cities. Prices range from around 200€ to over a thousand for a season pass. Hubs in Spain include Sevilla, Tárifa, Granada, Málaga, Salamanca, Valencia, Toledo, Madrid, San Sebastián, Barcelona and Zaragoza. The service also arranges hostel accommodations at each destination. **Eurolines** offers a Eurolines Pass (*www.eurolines.com*) that is valid in the off-season for 15, 30 or 60 days. This pass is for unlimited travel in 21 European countries, but the only Spanish cities it serves are Madrid and Barcelona. If it is sightseeing through a window you seek, **Autocares Julia** *(www.julia.net)* is the largest bus tour company in Spain.

■ Metro (Subway) Systems

Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Bilbao are all well connected by Metro subway systems. Though they are easy to use, it is smart to get a map of the system. The Madrid Metro is open from 6 am to 1:30 am, and runs directly from the airport if you fly in to Madrid. In addition, Valencia offers a street tram service. If you plan to spend more than a day in the city, buy a special 10-trip bus/Metro pass available at Metro stations and tobacco shops. Keep in mind that cities can be easily traversed on foot.

> **Tip:** Remember to mind your possessions in the subways and on crowded trains, as these are fertile stomping grounds for pickpockets and other contemptible thieves.

■ Rental Cars

Though you'll miss some of the people-watching available on public transportation services, a rental car allows the freedom to get outside of the heavily traveled tourist loop and go anywhere at anytime. In most cases you must be 21 to rent a car, have an international driver's license (which can be obtained at any AAA) and pay with a credit card. The major international rental car companies are represented, as are a number of regional ones. In general, the international companies are more expensive, costing around 60€ per day plus 0.15€ per kilometer and IVA (the abbreviation for Spanish sales taxes). Regional companies will

charge around 55€ a day for a small car with no charge for kilometers. You get a better rate if renting for a week or longer. Additional charges will be levied for collision damage waivers, theft and third party insurance, and IVA sales tax. The British company **CarJet** *(www.carjet.com)*, as well as **EuropCar** (*www.europcar.com*) are two common rental agencies in Spain. International companies include:

Alamo: ☎ 800-462-5266, www.alamo.com

Avis: ☎ 800-472-3325, www.avis.com

Budget: ☎ 800-437-9440, www.budget.com

Dollar: ☎ 800-788-7863, www.dollar.com

Hertz: ☎ 800-654-3131, www.hertz.com

National: ☎ 800-227-7368, www.nationalcar.com

Thrifty: ☎ 800-508-9000, www.thrifty.com

Another option which is seldom considered and is extremely advantageous for longer stays is a tax-free new car lease through companies such as **Europe By Car** *(☎ 800-223-1516; www.europebycar.com)*, which provides for a brand-new, un-taxed car including third-party and fire insurance, collision and theft insurance with no deductible, unlimited mileage, 24-hour emergency assistance and a factory warranty. These leases can last anywhere from 17 to 175 days but must be arranged (and prepaid) at least a month in advance in order to receive the voucher and have the car delivered to either Barcelona or Madrid for pick-up.

Driving in Spain

The sign in my head is flashing, "Warning: Spain has Europe's highest traffic mortality rate!" If you are not dissuaded, take comfort in the fact that cars are driven on the *right* side of the road in Spain. Roads are well maintained and signed. Traffic circles (*ronda*) are more common than traffic lights at intersections. Those in the traffic circles have the right of way. Common street signs include the "do not enter" sign (red with a white horizontal bar); restricted or no parking (blue with a red X) and the triangular yield sign. Drinking and driving in Spain is risky, with a blood-alcohol limit of .05%, or .03% for drivers with less than two years' experience. Rear seat belts must be worn if available. If you do find yourself pulled over with a Guardia Civil officer tapping on your window, know that you can be fined up to 150€ on the spot, though as a foreigner you'll receive a 20% discount off the normal fine schedule and can contest the fine in writing within 10 days.

City meters in Spain are not placed on poles at each parking spot (typically indicated by blue striping on the street), but rather at one blue machine somewhere along the street. You may have to look around for it. To operate it, simply put your money in and push the green button. A ticket will be printed which should be placed on the dash of your car. A white "P" surrounded in blue denotes public parking. A "P" surrounded by black indicates parking for specific people, residents, etc.

You can, of course, follow the signs to the city of your destination, though it doesn't hurt to understand the system. Many rental car agencies provide maps upon request. The letter "A," followed by a number (for example A-10), denotes expressways (*autopistas*). These are usually well-maintained toll roads but, for the sightseeing traveler, not worth the time saved and money

spent because of the attractions you will miss. Toll ways can be paid with cash or credit/debit cards, which you swipe in machines at the gate. These fees can be hefty. Non-expressways often run parallel with the *autopistas* and afford a better view of the countryside.

Many gas stations are still full-service and almost all are prepay.

It really is unnecessary to drive inside Spanish cities; your feet, the bus or the Metro system will get you anywhere you need to go, while avoiding the hassle of parking (and it is a hassle). Street signs are often hard to see and are mounted high on the side of corner buildings. Parking garages are the easiest way to put the car away for a day in the city, though prices can be as much as 20€ per 24 hours. For assistance similar to that offered by AAA, contact the **Real Automovil Club de España** *(Calle de Jose Abascal 10, Madrid, ☎ 900 20 00 93).* For 24-hour assistance, call ☎ 915 93 33 33. Further information on the Spanish road system and traffic regulations is available through Spain's traffic authority *(Dirección General de Tráfico; www.dgt.es).*

C/ & S/N ABBREVIATIONS

C/ is the standard Spanish abbreviation for *Calle* or Street. You will see s/n with many address listings, meaning *sin numero* – "no street number."

Understanding Spain's Rural Address System

Finding campgrounds, *casas rurales* and other sites on backcountry highways can be difficult. But the system can be understood with a few basic guidelines. Rural addresses are commonly preceded by the word *situado*, which means "located." Following this, a rural address may begin with the name of the nearest town, followed by the word *Carretera* (highway) or one of its abbrevations (*Ctra* or *C*). Next come the letters or numbers designating a particular highway, as in N-630, C-713 or Ex-109. In some cases, however, two place names will be given instead of the letters and numbers, as in *Carretera Villanueva-Huerta del Rio*. This tells you that the address is located somewhere on the highway that runs between those two towns. At rural traffic circles (*rondas*) and intersections, the roads veering off in all directions are usually identified only by a small sign showing the next town that road runs to. So carry a map because, if you want to get from, say, Granada to Cuenca, you'll need to know the towns that lie between them.

Finally, at the end of the address, a distance will be given, as in km 432, designating the exact point on the road where the location can be found. If you're uncertain which direction to head, keep an eye out for the kilometer markers posted along the roads to make sure you're approaching the number you want, rather than moving away from it.

So, to summarize, take a campground address in Cáceres as an example, such as Camping Las Cañadas (Baños de Montemayor, Ctra N-630, km 432). To get there, you would first drive to Baños de Montemayor and, from there, locate the N-630 highway. Once on the N-630, keep an eye on the km signs to make sure you're going in the right direction. If you run into problems or can't find the markers, the easiest solution would be to drive back to Baños de Montemayor and ask directions – *Sabes donde esta el camping Las Cañadas?*

■ Taxis

Taxis are metered and any extra charges must be posted (such as for trips to airports). After an initial charge upon entering the cab, the meter runs based on portions of kilometers or length of time in traffic. Tipping is optional, but should not amount to more than 10% of the fare.

■ Boats

Ferries offer a unique way to travel from Spain to its offshore provinces, and often with a free escort of dolphins. The national carrier **Transmediterranea** *(www.transmediterranea.com)* has regular connections from Barcelona and Valencia to the Balearic Islands and from Cádiz to the Canary Islands, as well as inter-island services. Trips to Melilla can be had from Almería and Málaga and to Ceuta and Tangier in Morocco from Algeciras. Note that in the off-season the frequency of trips is greatly reduced.

Backpacker's Survival Guide

"Don't take anything you aren't willing to lose." Backpacker's credo

■ Backpacking 101

A good trip begins with a good pack. Try out as many different packs as possible. The best packs have a removable top section (that can be worn like a fanny pack or over the shoulder for daytrips and can be carried on planes and buses), a zippered side-entry or full-frontal entry and a sturdy hip-belt, where most of the weight is distributed. Don't get a pack that's too big because you will undoubtedly fill it up. Once you pick that perfect pack, the store should bend the internal metal support strakes to conform to your back. If you don't want to stick out like a sore thumb (and be immediately recognized as an American), steer clear of North Face backpacks. There is a reason why Canadian travelers iron a maple leaf patch onto their packs.

Pack It or Leave It?

While you know best what you must pack, you might not have thought about these packing essentials and tips:

1. **A pliable canvas backpack**: For daytrips and short hikes, a small backpack like a Jansport can be easily rolled up and tied so as to take up very little space when not in use.

2. **Rope**: You will still find many good uses for rope.

3. **A good 35 mm or digital camera**: This is one of the few weight concessions that I think should be made. Avoid disposables. If you get into an accident of any kind, use the camera to document any damages.

4. **Pencils, not pens**: Pens tend to act rather inappropriately at high altitudes and when near expensive clothing.

5. **Dark clothes**: Besides the fact that Europeans tend toward dark clothes, these will help make the most out of those annoying laundry stops by cleverly concealing dirt and stains.

6. **Antiperspirant**: Yes, most Europeans do wear deodorant. But no, you aren't likely to find antiperspirant deodorants in Spain.

7. **A small first-aid kit**: This can be a lifesaver if you spend much time in the wild.

8. **Walking/tennis shoes** that can also match your dressy clothes: I know, it's a crazy idea, but you really can get by on just one pair of shoes in Spain if you pick the right ones.

9. Don't pack a tent and sleeping bag if you aren't camping. A small sleeping sheet will suffice when you find yourself lying in a hostel bed that probably hasn't been washed in weeks.

10. **A multi-tool**, not a knife: During my travels in Europe, I've run across Americans who like to carry a pocketknife for self-defense. Bad idea – this could lead to a dangerous confrontation. Some good multi-tool brands include Leatherman and Paratool (don't buy a cheap one). These will have a handy pair of pliers and all sorts of goodies for turning screws, opening wine bottles, etc. Must be packed in checked baggage for flights.

11. **A small spray bottle**: You won't want to be traveling with an iron, and if you don't like to wear wrinkled clothes, this is the next best thing. Just fill the bottle up with tap water when you need it and spray a light mist over any afflicted clothes. It will give you that fresh, just out of the drier look and can be hung on the pack when not in use.

Essential Information

■ Passport & Visa Guidelines

All nationalities outside of the European Union member states must have a valid passport for entry into Spain. Spanish law requires that visitors carry identification at all times and most hotels require ID for reservations. US passports cost $70 for ages 16 and below and $85 for the rest of us. Renewals cost $55. Upon application, passports usually take six weeks to receive. You can apply by mail with the US Passport Agency *(travel.state.gov/passport_services.html)* or in person at one of the numerous passport acceptance facilities nationwide *(www.iafdb.travel.state.gov)*. For further assistance, contact the **National Passport Information Center** *(☎ 900-225-5674, 888-362-8668)*. If you have waited until the last minute to apply for a passport, the following agencies offer rush service that takes two weeks and costs an extra $60 *(travel.state.gov/agencies_list.html)*: Boston, ☎ 617-878-0900; Chicago, ☎ 312-341-6020; Connecticut, ☎ 203-299-5443; Honolulu, ☎ 808-522-8283; Houston, ☎ 713-751-0294; Los Angeles, ☎ 310-575-5700; Miami, ☎ 305-539-3600; New Orleans, ☎ 504-412-2600; New York, ☎ 212-206-3500; Philadelphia, ☎ 415-538-2700; Seattle, ☎ 206-808-5700; Washington, ☎ 202-647-0518.

US citizens may travel in Spain for up to 90 days without a visa. Nonetheless, countless Americans and foreigners traveling or living in Spain manage to ignore this law without consequence; in this age of heightened security, this is increasingly risky and not recommended. If your passport has not been stamped upon entry into Spain, the authorities really have no way of knowing how long you have been in the country. If it has and you would like to stay

"legally" in the country for longer than three months, it is usually effective to travel to Morocco, the closet non-EU country and have it re-stamped for another three months. If in the country for other reasons, such as work or study, a visa is required and must be applied for and picked up in person in your country of origin months ahead of the planned trip, as issuance is not guaranteed. These come in 30- and 90-day single-entry versions, and 90-day multiple-entry versions. No more than two visas can be applied for in any 12-month period, and they may vary depending on what you plan to do while abroad. Visas require a valid passport and in some cases won't be granted if your expiration date is fast approaching. For stays longer than 90 days, you can apply for a *tarjeta de residencia* (residence card) during your first month in Spain. Also, three months extensions are occasionally granted to travelers without a visa and can be applied for at any major Spanish police station, though this may prove difficult and ineffective for non-Spanish-speaking travelers. Visas require specific documents, so consult your Spanish consulate ahead of time. The following are telephone numbers of Spain's US consulate offices: Boston, ☎ 617-536-2506; Chicago, ☎ 312-782-4588; Houston, ☎ 713-783-6200; Los Angeles, ☎ 323-938-0158; Miami, ☎ 305-446-5511; New Orleans, ☎ 504-525-4951; New York, ☎ 212-355-4080; Puerto Rico, ☎ 787-758-6090; San Francisco, ☎ 415-922-2995; Washington, DC, ☎ 202-728-2330.

■ Customs

Outside of personal effects, perishable goods allowances include up to two liters of wine or liquor per person, 250 grams of tobacco, 200 cigarettes and 50 cigars.

■ Pets

Animals must accompany their owner who has obtained a written certification proving the animal has been kept under his or her supervision for the last three months and a veterinarian certificate stating the animal is healthy and previously inoculated for rabies. Forms are obtainable through the Embassy of Spain *(www.spainemb.org)* under the Agriculture, Fisheries and Food heading.

■ Money Issues

Currency

After February of 2002, the official currency of Spain transferred from the peseta to the euro. Spain shares this currency with Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal. Like the dollar, one euro is divided into 100 cents (*céntimos*). Banknotes come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros while coins are divided according to 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 cents and 1 and 2 euro pieces.

At the time of publication, the €1 was worth $1.21, with $1 valued at €.82.

Money Exchange Options

All Spanish banks can exchange travelers' checks and cash for the euro and typically offer a better exchange rate than the numerous exchange offices (*cambios*). The latter often stay open later and on weekends, but charge a commission around 3% of the transaction. In any case, check the rates posted outside the windows and confirm that they are current. Banks are generally open from 8:30 am to 2 pm weekdays and 9 am to 1 pm on Saturdays, though most are closed on Saturdays from June to September.

Paper or Plastic?

Travelers' checks generally carry a higher rate of exchange than cash, but can't be used for purchases. These can be exchanged for the euro at any bank or exchange office with a valid passport and are the best way to guard against loss since they can be replaced. Keep an accurate account of the checks you have and have not cashed, along with the receipts and the phone numbers of your particular travelers' check company to get replacements.

ATM cards that double as Visa credit cards are the easiest to use in and around Spain. ATMs (*cajero automatico*) are found throughout the country, though it is important that you check with your bank to make sure your pin number will work in foreign countries. In addition to any foreign surcharges, most US banks will levy a foreign conversion fee of around $3. Visa, American Express, MasterCard, Eurocard, Diners Club and Access are the most widely accepted credit cards. Many establishments will accept only cash, however, and signs will be posted to this effect. Notify your credit card company that you will be leaving the country so it doesn't become suspicious of foreign purchases and put a hold on your card.

■ Accommodations

There are three typical accommodation categories in Spain: hotels, hostels and pensiones. A blue sign posted outside with either an H, Hs, or P includes the number of stars awarded it by the government. The more stars, generally the nicer and more expensive the place. Additionally, a smaller number of youth hostels (*albergues juveniles*) are scattered throughout Spain; these offer the cheapest prices and simplest accommodations, often amounting to communal rooms and bath. If you travel during peak tourist season or to any of the major tourist cities, it's advisable to book in advance. Prices are usually higher in the peak season. While I've included phone numbers, and in most cases web and e-mail addresses for each accommodation, you can also book through the Spanish National Tourist Office or through many travel agents.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Paradores

Paradores (www.parador.es) are a state-run network of about 80 hotels that were established during the sixties, initially as unique budget locales. Today they are *the* place to stay and therefore reservations should be made in ad-

vance. Though the prices have steadily risen, and justifiably so, these are still quite a deal and the most charming accommodation options. Most are located in former palaces, castles or notable monuments that have been elegantly refurbished to reflect the predominant region's ambiance and gastronomy. Reservations for Paradores can be made from the US by calling **Marketing Ahead** (☎ *800-223-1356*) or **Petrabax** (☎ *800-634-1188*); in Spain, call its **Central Reservation Office** (☎ *91 516 66 66 or fax* ☎ *91 516 66 57*).

> **TIP:** In summer, in the south, make sure to book a place with aire condicionado (air conditioning).

Hotels (Hoteles)

At the top end of your choices, hotels generally have pleasant furnishings, private bathrooms and air-conditioning. Prices in most cases range from 40 to 360€. Hotels are ranked from five stars (top-end) to one star (low-end). For further information, contact the **Spanish Hotel Federation** (Federación Española de Hoteles; ☎ *91 556 71 12*).

Hostels (Hostales)

Many of Spain's cheapest accommodations – youth hostels (in Spanish, albergues juventud) – are run by the nonprofit organization Hostelling International (bookings ☎ 301 495 1240), with its subsidiaries the International Youth Hostel Federation and National Youth Hostel Association. To stay in one of the HI youth hostels, you'll normally need a membership card specifically for Europe. The easiest way to obtain one, rather than navigating the various convoluted websites associated with HI, is to call the booking number listed above. Depending on your age, a one-year membership costs $20-30. With the card, a one-night stay generally costs 10-15€. HI hostels can be distinguished from the many privately owned hostels throughout Spain, which do not require a membership card for reservations and, in certain cases, lack the standards that make HI hostels worth the membership fee. Further information and a listing of every HI youth hostel in Spain can be obtained at the Hostelling International website, or at Spain's own youth hostel site, www.reaj.com.

Don't expect to return late at night and throw a party in a hostel, as walls are thin and visitors are expected to sleep, not entertain. Non-paying visitors are frowned upon. Most hostels have television, air-conditioning and heating with private baths, towels and plain restaurants on the first floor. Rates can vary from 10€ (a rarity) to 60€ per person. *Hostal Residencias* (denoted HsR) encourage longer-term room rentals.

Pensiones

At the low end, pensiones have small, simple (and often run-down) rooms that most likely will lack air-conditioning and private bathrooms. In winter the small furnaces often make for chilly sleeping conditions. There are exceptions, however, though these "nicer" pensiones are usually found outside the major cities. Many rooms have a sink but no towel. In most cases, pensiones do not accept credit cards. Prices range anywhere from 5 to 30€ per person.

Apartments & Villas

These properties are more common in coastal resort areas and are a good option for families or large groups preferring a more private, home-like setting. They are usually rented for at least a week at a time and can be reserved through the following US companies: **Sun Holidays** *(☎ 800-422-8000)*; **Europa Let** *(☎ 800-462-4486)*; **Keith Prowse Co.** *(☎ 800-669-8687)*; **Villas**

International *(☎ 800-221-2260)*; and **International Lodging Corp.** *(☎ 800-Spain-44).*

Camping (Campings)

Spain maintains over 1,000 official campgrounds (*campings*) with a combined capacity of approximately 650,000 campers. The sites are located in some of Spain's most beautiful natural spaces as well as in some of its most unappealing, flat, dusty concrete zones. Each can accommodate anywhere from 100 to thousands of campers and cost anywhere from 1.5€ to 5€ per day, although children get a discount. Prices are levied per person, tent space and vehicle. An annual camping guide (*Guía de Campings*) is available at most bookstores and at some tourist offices; it lists every site and available amenities. Before choosing a campground, check to make sure what, if any, public transportation is nearby, as most are located outside of the cities, often outside the realm of public transport. It usually isn't necessary to make a reservation, though some of the more popular campgrounds are full during July and August and many are closed during the winter months.

Like hotels, campgrounds are rated according to their amenities, from the nicest 1st class (1a C) grounds offering places to buy groceries, eat, swim, have clothes cleaned and play sports, to the median 2nd class (2a C) and the lesser 3rd class (3a C), which should at least have electrical connections and showers. *Zonas de Acampadas* are rural grounds with few, if any, facilities or supervision and no charge (occasionally, you will need permission from a nearby park official). These are not to be confused with private lands (*coto privado*), which are usually off-limits and, when near popular natural areas, may be indicated by a "*No Acampada*" sign. Mountain shelters (*refugios*) offer free camping in and around national parks. Camping on the beach and outside denoted camping areas is discouraged (and expressly forbidden by many local laws), but still practiced. For further information, contact the **Spanish Camping and Holiday-Complex Federation** *(Federación Española de Campings y Ciudades de Vacaciones; ☎ 91 562 99 94).*

■ Dining

Eating customs vary greatly from the US. Spaniards typically eat slowly – dining is seen more as a relaxed meeting time and meals are served late. With work usually lasting until 7:30 pm, dinner (*cena*) is normally served around 9 or 10 pm. The biggest meal of the day is lunch (*almuerzo*), and it is served between 1 and 3 pm. Breakfast (*desayuno*) is usually small, consisting of coffee or a chocolate drink and a pastry.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Restaurants follow these same serving hours, with kitchens often closed during siesta and only sandwiches (*bocadillos*) or a handful of snacks (*tapas*) available in the meantime. Tipping is optional (though not usually included in the check). It is appropriate to leave at least the coins after a snack or drinks and more and more customary to leave up to a 10% tip after a full meal. For ease with ordering, restaurants are required to offer a menu of the day (*menu del día*) that includes an appetizer, a main course, dessert, bread and one drink for around 10€. But that menu usually lacks the establish-

ment's best offerings. A less expensive combination plate (*plato combinado*) is served in lesser restaurants. These include one or two main dishes, vegetables and bread. If your waiter puts a basket of bread in the center of your table, you'll have to pay for it only if you eat it. If you get hungry between meals, your best bet is to hit up a *tapas* bar for a snack. Meals are usually more expensive if you sit at a table or outside as opposed to the bar.

TIP: Restaurants are often closed on Sundays in Spain.

■ Electricity

European electrical outlets run at 220 volts as opposed to 110 volts in the US. You will need to buy a 110-220 voltage converter and three-prong to two-prong AC adaptor to use appliances. These are available at most travel/luggage stores and at electronic stores. There are different types of converters for different types of appliances. Some small electronics, razors and non-heating appliances will need a 50-watt converter, while bigger appliances like irons and coffee makers require a 1,600-watt converter. Check the labels for voltage rates.

If you plan to stay in the country for an extended period, consider buying hair dryers and razors there or bringing small, battery-operated appliances from home. All these accessories can weigh you down.

■ Computers & Peripherals

For the Internet, you will need a long telephone cord, a modular Spanish telephone adaptor, a plug providing two- and three-prong adapters, a 3-to-1 power plug (for printers, etc.), and the appropriate Internet dial-up information (POP3, SMTP, password, access number) as supplied by your server.

■ Laundry

Small laundry (*lavandarías*) and dry-cleaning (*tintorerías*) stores are all over though you won't likely find the typical US "do it yourself" laundromat. An average load costs around 6€. Most hotels and a handful of hostels and pensiones offer laundry services.

■ Photography

Camera film is available in most name brands at tourist shops, department stores (such as El Corté Ingles) and at photography shops for around 5€ a roll. Standard processing for one roll of film costs about 4€, while express one-day service costs roughly 7€.

■ Staying in Touch

"Two great talkers will not travel far together." Spanish Proverb

Telephone

Public pay phones painted in blue are prevalent and work on either change or phone cards. Phone booths are available in shops called *locutorios*. If you plan to use a phone card supplied by your US carrier, check with them prior to leaving to insure that the card will work internationally. Also note that toll-free numbers do not work outside the US. International phone cards (*tarjetas telefonicas internationales*) are available at tobacco shops (*tabacos*), many newsstands (*revistas*), tourist shops and department stores. These have easy-to-understand directions on the back and can cost as little as 5€. To use them, simply

enter the toll-free phone number printed on the back, follow the prompt to enter the pin-number and then enter the 00 international code followed by the country code (for the US, 1), then the area code and number of the location you are dialing. For calls within Spain placed in this manner, first dial the country code 34. Directory information can be reached by dialing 1003.

If you plan to stay in Spain for a longer amount of time, consider buying a cell phone, the cheapest of which will not work outside Spain and functions with pre-paid chips. These are inexpensive compared to US cell phones and incoming international calls do not count against your minutes. Be careful, though; outgoing international calls made from these phones will wipe out your allotted minutes in a hurry. When you run out of minutes, simply buy a new chip at one of the tobacco shops or newsstands.

To call Spain from North America, dial the international access code (011), then the country code for Spain (34), followed by the area code (3 for Barcelona, 91 for Madrid, 95 for Seville, 96 for Valencia, etc.), and finally the local number.

Internet Cafés

Look for signs that say either "Internet," or "Red," or seek out a phone house (*locutorio*), many of which now contain at least one Internet console. Internet cafés are common and costs range from 1€ per hour on up.

> **Tip:** Many e-mail accounts aren't accessible abroad, so it may be smart to have a free back-up account such as those offered by Yahoo or Hotmail, so long as you won't be receiving large messages.

Snail-Mail

Post offices (*oficinas de correos*) are open usually from 8:30 am to 8:30 pm on weekdays, and 9 am to 1:30 pm on Saturday. All cities and most small towns have at least one post office. International stamps can be purchased at all tobacco shops (*tabacos* or *estancos*). Mail can be posted in the yellow sidewalk drop boxes or at the post office. Delivery time to the US is typically around 10 days. If you intend to receive mail while in Spain, either rent a PO Box (*apartado postal*) or pass along the addresses of the places you will be staying (or of a nearby post office) and instruct the sender to mail at least 10 days prior to your arrival.

■ Print & Media

The major daily newspapers of Spain are ***El País*** (an English version is available inside *The Herald Newspaper*), the politically minded ***El Mundo***, and the conservative ***ABC***. Regional dailies abound. English-language newspapers and magazines are found readily in the coastal areas and major cities. International versions of many popular magazines, including *Time* and *Newsweek,* are available at some newsstands and at bookstores.

You will not likely find an English-language TV channel, though American movies dubbed in Spanish are fairly common. The major television stations include the state-run **Television Espanola**, pay channel **Canal Plus**, and many other regional stations.

■ Special Concerns

Crime

Spain is no more dangerous than the next country, but any unsuspecting tourist is a prime target for those less-inclined to earn an honest living. Transportation and hubs such as Metro systems, train stations, and buses are the most vulnerable places. Don't leave your bags unwatched, don't use billfolds and checkbooks that stick up above your pocket (it's best to keep wallets in front pockets), and don't travel with lots of cash. You should avoid traveling alone at night in the cities and deserted spaces. Steer clear of the typical haunts, dark alleyways and doorway perches. The bigger cities, especially, it seems, Barcelona, are hotspots for thievery. That said, the chances of your actually encountering any of these problems are slim to none.

Petty Crime & Dirty Tricks

If a stranger is acting overly excited in your presence, talking rapidly or using quick body motions, be wary and guard your belongings. The following are some of the typical tricks used by thieves that I've noticed during my travels. And remember, don't be scared, be secure.

"The Fútbol Lesson"

Scenario: A would-be pickpocket walks up and wraps his leg around your own. He insists he is trying to teach you a soccer move.

Result: This "coach" nabs your wallet while you're distracted.

Advice: Don't let anyone get too close for comfort and try to wear wallets in the front pockets instead of the back.

"The Flat Tire"

Scenario: You are sitting in a parked car when a person approaches and points at your tire. He acts very concerned and attempts to open the car door to get you out. He would have you believe the tire is flat.

Result: In the split-second you're distracted, an accomplice sneaks around the back of the car and grabs whatever he can through a window or door.

Advice: If sitting inside a parked car, keep all the doors locked, windows up and don't get out for just anybody.

"Empty Purse"

Scenario: You are in a crowded place wearing a big purse on your shoulder. A thief uses the crowd for cover as he slits the bottom of your purse with a knife.

Result: The contents of your purse are emptied into the thief's purse.

Advice: This is one trick you can't see coming. Do not keep important documents or valuables in a purse while abroad. Avoid carrying big purses.

"Loose Change"

Scenario: You are walking down the street when a kid comes up and begins to drop change at your feet. He beckons for you to help him pick it all up.

Result: When you bend over to help, another thief is waiting behind you to slip the wallet out of your back pocket.

Advice: Don't pick up someone else's change, even if you are superstitious.

"The Crooked Cop"

Scenario: You are in a subway when a Metro official approaches and asks to see your turnstile stub.

Result: If you've trashed the stub, the official will make you pay handily and arbitrarily (these fines won't be going to the government).

Advice: Save all receipts and stubs.

"The Train Extortionist"

Scenario: You've hopped on a train and either misplaced your pass or forgotten to buy one altogether. Now you're well on your way when the train attendant comes up the aisle and asks to see your ticket to stamp it.

Result: If you don't have a pass, the attendant will charge you a much higher price for one on the spot. Refuse, and he will angrily request your passport.

Advice: This is a gray area. In most situations, the train attendant has the right to ask for your passport. Likewise, you have the right to refuse (though you may find yourself kicked off at the next stop, or worse). If you do hand over your passport, though, you've given over any leveraging power you had and it's either pay up or order a new passport.

"The Fly By"

Scenario: You are walking along with a camera or purse draped over your shoulder. Suddenly someone runs by on foot or on a moped and snatches your goods.

Result: Sometimes the strap holds, but in the case of the moped this can lead to some nasty scrapes and bruises after you've been lifted off your feet and slammed to the ground.

Advice: Always wear a camera around your neck and keep it in front of your body. Keep purses small or use a day pack or fanny pack, dorky as the latter may be.

Important Contacts

- **Emergencies** *(☎ 112; Ambulance, Police and Fire Brigade)*
- **Civil Guard** *(Avda. Pulianas, s/n, ☎ 958 18 54 00 or 062)*
- **National Police** *(☎ 952 04 62 00)*

Health

Travel is generally as safe for your health here as travel in the US. If you have concerns, contact the **National Health Institute** *(☎ 913 38 00 07)*. It is recommended that you see your physician in the weeks prior to your departure to insure that your shots are up-to-date. These include a tetanus-diptheria booster and, possibly, a hepatitus A or hepatitus B vaccination. You will need the hepatitis B vaccination if you are going to be in Spain for more than a couple of months, anticipate having sexual contact with the local population or will need any sort of medical treatment that exposes you to needles and transfusions.

Tap water (*agua del grifo*) is generally potable in homes, restaurants and hotels. If you have doubts, bottled water is cheap and widely available either with or without gas (*con* or *sin gas*). Avoid drinking water from natural areas such as streams or lakes, and use caution when drinking from city water

fountains. If you see the sign "*agua no potable*," you'll know not to drink the water.

Insurance

Medical: It's advisable to check with your US health insurance policy supplier to know what medical coverage will be while abroad. Some plans cover minor procedures and doctor visits while abroad for a limited period of time.

Travel: If you plan to travel with valuable objects, travel insurance is recommended. Lost possessions are often covered under your homeowners insurance, though the deductible may be more than the value of the possessions.

Embassies & Diplomatic Relations

US Embassy in Spain: *(Calle de Serrano 75, Madrid, ☎ 915-87-40-00; www.embusa.es)*. Diplomatic Representation is headed by Ambassador George L. Argyros, the current Chief of Mission *(☎ 915-87-22-00, fax 915-87-23-03)*. The Consulate General is located in Barcelona. **Spanish Embassy in the US**: *(2375 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037, ☎ 202-452-0100 or 728-2340, fax 202-833-5670; www.spainemb.org)*. Chief of Mission is Ambassador Francisco Javier Ruperez. Consulate generals are located in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, and San Juan (Puerto Rico).

Drugs & Alcohol

Spain is a key gateway country for Latin American cocaine and North African hashish entering Europe. Though it is not illegal to possess small quantities of marijuana for personal use, it is illegal to buy it. Thus a conundrum. You will find that in some bars Spaniards light up freely. Try this in others and you may well get tossed out to the curb. If you are entering Spain from Morocco, be prepared for intensive drug searches.

Facing the facts, some travelers will attempt to buy drugs while abroad. Though inherently risky, some actions could make an exchange dangerous or even deadly and should be avoided. If you are one of these risk-takers, never follow a drug dealer to his "home" or around a corner, to a deserted street or to any unlit area. This dealer may just be a mugger waiting for you to fall into his trap.

Senior Travelers

Travelers 60 and older can expect some discounts on air and rail transportation as well as on entrances to museums and cultural monuments. Coastal cities have large populations of British and German seniors and thus more opportunities to save a few euros. Many of the finer hotels, including the government run paradores, offer senior discounts. In any case, check with your travel agent or stateside Spanish tourism office to learn more before setting off.

Gay & Lesbian Travelers

Since *La Movida*, a cultural awakening that Spain experienced in the 1980s thanks largely to the efforts of openly gay film director Pedro Almodovar, Spain has become increasingly open and accepting of its gay and lesbian population. While the older generation is still prone to cast a disapproving eye at same-sex partners, much of the younger generation couldn't care less. Both young and old Spaniards in rural areas, just as in the United States, are less

accustomed to openly gay or lesbian couples and may come off as rude or insulting. Hostility, though, is something few Spaniards tolerate. In these rural areas many would prefer that such affairs not be carried on in the public eye. Pay no mind, homosexuality is perfectly legal in Spain and most major cities have proud gay and lesbian communities and a thriving rainbow scene. Madrid, Barcelona, Sitges, Valencia and Granada all have numerous gay-friendly bars and restaurants and even, in some cases, beaches.

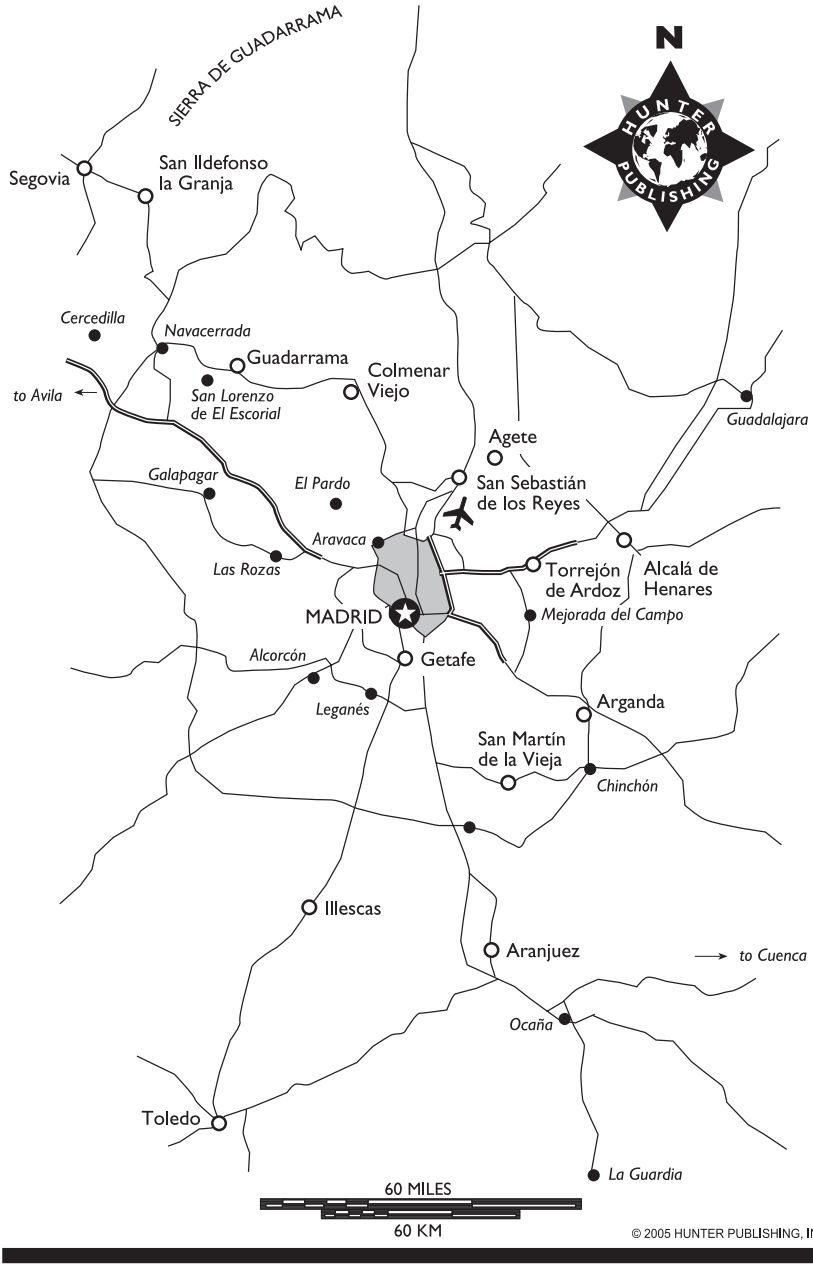
Disabled Travelers

During the past decade the government has taken strides to make its public spaces and facilities accommodating to disabled locals and travelers. Still, Spain's infrastructure for the disabled lags behind the most developed EU member states and even further behind that of the United States. In rural areas wheelchair ramps, disabled parking spaces and public transportation for the disabled are virtually non-existent. Villages are often built on high promontories, making cobbled streets steep and staircases prevalent where lifts are not.

On the upside, cities are leading the cause and national laws mandating that new public buildings be equipped with disabled facilities should begin to pay off over time. Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao, Valencia, Zaragoza and Santander all have public buses for the disabled and wheelchair ramps are increasingly common. Additionally, special taxis are slowly being phased into service, particularly in Madrid and Barcelona. By law, seeing eye dogs must be allowed onto public transportation. Most hotels are equipped to accommodate disabled travelers, as are train stations and their trains. Hostels and pensiones are somewhat hit or miss. Many are accessible by small lifts, but others can be reached only up narrow, spiraling staircases.

Air Iberia, the national airline *(☎ 800-772-4642, www.iberia.com)*, offers disabled accommodations and a program known as RED JACKET, whereby employees assist disabled travelers from the moment they arrive at the airport to the moment they pick up their bags in their destination. And Hertz Rent-a-Car maintains cars at its Barcelona and Madrid agencies that have been adapted for disabled use with installed hand controls. Few of these cars are in service, though, making it paramount that you contact the agency well ahead of time. Make arrangements through their US contacts: ☎ 800-654-3131, www.hertz.com. Tourist pamphlets rarely list services for disabled travelers, but in many cases the staff is knowledgeable in these respects. To get the full scoop ahead of time, contact the **Instituto Nacional de Servicios Sociales** (INSERSO), which handles disabled affairs under the Ministry of Social Affairs, *C/ Guinzo de Limia 58, 28029 Madrid, ☎ 91 347 70 00.*

Communidad de Madrid



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The Communidad de Madrid

The autonomous community of Madrid, though diminutive in size, occupies the geographical center of Spain and commands a leading role in the eyes of the national public as a seat of major media outlets and national politics. With over three million people, Madrid is the bull's-eye on this mostly dry, rolling high plain that is part of the expansive Meseta Central characterizing much of the province and the country around it. The city's elevation, at 585 m (2,100 feet) above sea level, makes it the highest European capital and the one with the most startling climatic extremes. In the winter, the weather is dismal and almost invariably freezing. With the arrival of the dry summer months of July and August, it is so grievously hot that simply breathing can be unpleasant and sightseeing during the heat of the day torturous. Visit the city in the early spring or late fall, when the weather is not so tormenting and the swarming tourists fewer and farther between.

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The extreme temperatures in the center of the region are due in part to the shielding effect of the Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains, a great mass of granite rising in the north as a continuation of the country's central mountain range, the Cordillera Central. Just a short jaunt from Madrid, this realm enjoys cool weather year-round and forms a stunning visual contrast to the plains surrounding Madrid, with its slopes covered in pine forests and the prismatic bands of the rivers Manzanares and Jarama coursing southward toward the larger Tagus. The range serves to separate Madrid from Castilla y León to the north and west, while the south of the province is bordered by the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha. Even as much of its area has been swallowed up by the urban sprawl of the capital city, the Communidad de Madrid is not all, as some would liken it, one big city. Areas around the perimeter are still relatively natural or, at the least, retaining of a more traditional charm with their poultry houses and pig farms, rather than high rises and smokestacks. On the lower slopes of the Guadarrama, small villages are isolated and free of tourists for much of the year. Trails are marked throughout and, in good years, snow is plentiful enough to ski.

South of Madrid, the beautiful city of Aranjuez is lush and leisurely along the banks of turquoise waters and to the west the monumental El Escorial makes a perfect day-trip en route to the popular cities of Segovia or Salamanca on the far side of the mountains.

The City of Madrid

> *"In a sense no visitor can ever be adequately prepared to judge a foreign city, let alone an entire nation; the best he can do is to observe with sympathy."* James Michener, *Iberia*

Madrid has been called the greatest Spanish city. There is no denying its supremacy in the realms of commerce, politics and sport (the sharply divided Spaniards agree on one thing: Real Madrid soccer team is the surest bet). And there's no escaping its romping, rollicking late-night tendencies. Still, the capital city's charm may elude the beleaguered traveler who, having ar-

rived with expectations of a slower pace in a less-costly Spain and of architecture dating back more than a just a few centuries, finds something altogether different. Madrid is any other Spanish city on speed. A newcomer could easily get lost, bewildered and frustrated in the crowds. At each turn harried masses dash to and fro, appearing bent on some purpose and yet, despite the prevailing rush, the Madrileños are, by and large, as welcoming and friendly as a rural Galician or a lonely Extremaduran. The shoeshine man in Plaza Mayor is content to people-watch rather than polish shoes and earn a few coins; the singing guitarist outside Café Oriente still smiles when a tourist refuses to tip him; the sharp-suited executive lingers in Casa Pablo for another drink or two, for the whole afternoon, rather than return to work. As a local friend once explained, *"En Madrid, no vivimos para trabajar, trabajamos para vivir! We don't live to work, we work to live!"*

So it goes with this sprawling city of the plain, whose industry has for centuries attracted Spaniards from all parts of the country and where, despite the influx of international "isms" during the recent past, the tendency to *disfruta la vida* is still embraced wholeheartedly. With a population representative of every Spanish region, with the nation's greatest collection of artworks on display in the nation's best museums, there is no greater whirlwind introduction to the country than by way of Madrid. Once you've roamed the halls of the Prado for hours on end and still not seen all the works, or danced away the night at Palacio only to learn the following day that a far better and less-touristy disco is just around the corner, then you will understand why Madrid is best approached on its own terms. It isn't a love affair that keeps people coming back to this city time and again, but more like a life-long courtship.

> *"From Madrid to heaven, and in heaven a little window by which to see it."* Local saying

■ History

At the beginning of the 10th century, Arab Emir Mohamed I (852-886) hastened construction of a fortress on a promontory overlooking the Manzanares River. Magerit, the Arab town that sprang up around the fortress, was intended as a northern defensive outpost of Toledo and served that charge until the Christian King Alfonso VI took over the town from the Muslims in 1083. In the ensuing years the city expanded gradually, the Moors were expelled from their neighborhood, the Morería, and the walls were torn down by order of Fernando and Isabel to allow further growth.

By the time Felipe II (1556-1598) moved the court here from Toledo in 1561, Madrid claimed over 100,000 people. In choosing this unlikely setting as the seat of the government, Felipe II raised more than a few eyebrows; the surrounding area is relatively unremarkable save for the mountains in the north and the coasts were then, as they are today, only a summer expectation. He was aware of the geographical centrality of Madrid in relation to the rest of the country, which would facilitate the administration of the outlying regions; but he also prudently recognized that the town, which had been a relatively insignificant and undesirable place until then, was not bound by potentially disloyal or threatening ties. It wasn't until 1561 that Felipe III officially made the city the country's national capital.

Under the Habsburgs, who took control in the 16th century, Madrid saw greater expansion and the construction of many of its most notable monuments, including the grand Plaza Mayor. During the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the Bourbons came into power. Their reign would spell grandiose improvements within the city, owing in large part to the diligence of Carlos III (1759-1788), who took a particular interest in the city's refinement. He was the first of the monarchs to move into the Palacio Real, construction of which was begun under Felipe V, and he is credited with charting an urban scheme that would prove to carry Madrid well into the 21st century.

Dark days followed as the city was overrun by French troops during the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon's brother Joseph was anointed ruler and subsequently saw to it that precious parts of the city, which he felt was too cramped, were torn down to allow it to breathe a little. Despite the popular uprising of the Madrileños on May 2, 1808, the Bourbon Fernando VII would not return from imprisonment until 1814. With his reinstatement, paintings were soon being moved into the former natural history museum in what would constitute one of the world's greatest art collections; street numbers were installed, waste collection was initiated and major avenues like the Paseo del Prado were lengthened. In 1910 the avenue known as Gran Vía was cut through the *barrio* (neighborhood) of San Bernardo and towering buildings, theaters and cafés later sprung up on both sides. But the relentless expansion that had characterized Madrid was due for another setback as the events of the Spanish Civil War began to take center stage in the province.

In 1931 the Republic was declared and years of heavy bombardment ensued. Madrid's population, as well as its architecture, suffered heavily as combat lines merged on the city and Franco's troops laid siege during a slow, grueling period from 1936 to 1939. The Nationalist victory assured, Madrid came to be treated with contempt under Franco. Time was the dictator's undoing as the more vocal among the population gradually pressed for reforms and greater freedoms. Following Franco's death in the mid-seventies, Madrid came into its own. The constitutional monarchy was restored under King Juan Carlos. Madrid, though still the country's national seat of government, began the slow process of decentralization that would give greater rights and authority to the other 16 autonomous communities.

■ Getting Here

By Air: Spain's largest airport, **Aeropuerto Internacional de Barajas** *(reservations ☎ 90 240 05 00; info ☎ 90 235 35 70 or 91 305 83 46)* is just northwest of Madrid and hosts flights from all over the world. The airport can be reached by taxi in 20 minutes (approx. 15€ plus 4€ airport surcharge) and by the Metro line Barajas. Otherwise, take the Bus-Aeropuerto #89 *(info ☎ 91 431 61 92)* that runs from both national and international airport terminals to Plaza de Colón (Metro, Colón) in the city center.

By Rail: The largest train station, **Estación Atocha** *(Avenida Ciudad de Barcelona, ☎ 915 06 61 36 or ☎ 913 28 90 20; Metro, Atocha Renfe)* services primarily Andalusia, Extremadura and Portugal. This is where the high-speed AVE train (Madrid-Sevilla, 2½ hours) arrives and where local trains for the outlying areas of the community are caught. An underground train connects it to **Estación Chamartín** *(C/ Agustín de Foxá, ☎ 913 00 69*

69; Metro, Chamartín) in the north of the city, which caters to destinations in northern Spain and international locales. Tickets and schedules are available at the stations or by calling or stopping by the main RENFE office *(C/ de Alcalá 44, ☎ 91 328 90 20; www.renfe.es).*

By Bus: Estación Sur de Autobuses *(C/ Méndez Álvaro, ☎ 91 468 42 00; Metro, Méndez Álvaro)* is the main bus station in Madrid, offering service via private companies to most major destinations in the country, as well as many Western European destinations. Within Spain these include Albacete, Algecira, Alicante, Ávila, Barcelona, Benidorm, Cartagena, A Coruña, Gijón, Lugo, Murcia, Oviedo, Santiago de Compostela, Segovia and Toledo. Call the information line above or check with the tourist office for current scheduling.

A number of smaller stations operate in Madrid as well, although their respective carriers generally maintain a ticket and information office at this main station. **Estación de Auto-Res** *(Metro, Conde de Casal, ☎ 90 202 09 99)* serves Badajoz, Cáceres, Castellón, Cuenca, Salamanca, Valencia, Vigo and Zamora. **Estación de La Sepulvedana** *(Metro, Príncipe Pío, ☎ 91 530 48 00)* serves Segovia. **Estación de Autobuses de Avenida de América** *(Avenida de América, ☎ 91 745 63 00)* serves Alcalá de Henares, Barcelona, Guadalajara and Zaragoza. Other stations include **Continental Auto** *(Metro, Cartagena, ☎ 917 45 63 00)*; **Herranz** *(Metro, Moncloa, ☎ 91 896 90 28)*; and **Alacuber** *(Metro, Moncloa, ☎ 91 376 01 04)*.

By Car: All distances are measured from Madrid. If you're 500 km (300 miles) away in Galicia, you'll still have little trouble finding the way back to the center of the country. The main roads leading out of Madrid are the **N-1** (Burgos-Irún-French border), **N-II** (Zaragoza-Barcelona-La Junquera-French border), **N-III** (Valencia-Alicante), **N-IV** (Córdoba-Sevilla-Cádiz), **N-V** (Badajoz-Potuguese border), **N-VI** (Coruña), **N-401** (Toledo).

■ Getting Around

By Bus: The **EMT** bus system *(☎ 91 406 88 10)* runs continually from 6 am to midnight while the **Búho** (owl) night service runs less frequently along selected routes from midnight-6 am. One-way tickets cost 1.05€ and are purchased on the bus (though don't hand the driver a 50€ bill and expect him to make change). For more than one trip, purchase the METROBUS voucher of 10 trips at a reduced rate in Metro and bus stations or at tobacos (*estancos*). Maps (*planos de los transportes)* are posted at all stops or can be picked up at tourism offices.

By Car: Curbside parking is an ordeal in Madrid. Garages, however, are fairly common (look for the blue "G" sign) and charge per hour at a comparable rate to the streets, without the hassle of having to return every two hours to drop coins in the meter. A typical 24-hour rate is 15€. Metered parking spaces (marked in blue) are free at night, generally from 8 pm-8 am.

By Metro: The Madrid Metro *(☎ 90 244 44 03; www.metromadrid.es)* runs from 6 am-1:30 am and is the cheapest and most efficient way to zip around Madrid (relatively safe and clean, too). One-way tickets cost 1.05€. If you plan to use the Metro more than once, buy a 10-trip ticket for 5€ either at a machine or at the ticket window of any Metro stop (ask for *un sencillo* for a single or *uno de diez* for a 10-trip ticket). A map of the Metro lines (*plano del metro*) is available at these offices as well as at any tourism office, but one is also posted

at each stop. Bicycles are allowed on the Metro only on weekends and during festivals from 6 am-4 pm.

By Taxi: It's not hard to flag down a taxi – they are everywhere. The green *libre* sign indicates that the cab is free. Upon entry, a base fare will be levied of around 2€ and the fare will add up according to distance traveled. Most taxi drivers are honest and a fountain of information if you can understand them, but it doesn't hurt to check that they've turned the meter on. Expect surcharges of up to 4€ for trips to the airport and bus or train stations. If you you've left something in a taxi, keep your fingers crossed and call ☎ 91 588 43 46 any time from 9 am-2 pm M-F. To request a taxi by phone, ☎ 91 371 37 11, 91 447 51 80 or 91 445 90 08 and expect to wait at least 10 minutes. Service for the physically impaired can be arranged by at ☎ 91 547 82 00 or 91 547 86 00.

■ Information Sources

"In this world of instant communication, is it any wonder we're all lost?" Junk e-mail

Tourism Offices

Municipal Tourism Office *(Plaza Mayor 3, ☎ 91 366 54 77; Metro, Sol)*. Multi-lingual walking tours through Habsburg Madrid depart from this office every Saturday at 10 am. **Regional Tourism Office** *(C/ Duque de Medinaceli 2, ☎ 91 429 49 51; Metro, Plaza de España)*. **Municipal Board of Tourism and Congress Offices** *(C/ Mayor 69, ☎ 91 588 29 00)*. Tickets can be purchased here for guided tours of Madrid hosted by **Descubre Madrid** *(Discover Madrid, ☎ 90 222 16 22)*.

Token Tours

Day and evening tours of Madrid with the option for dinner or a flamenco show can be arranged through **Juliatur** *(Gran Vía 68, ☎ 91 559 96 05, Metro, Plaza de España)*, **Pullmantur** *(Plaza de Oriente 8, ☎ 91 541 18 05, Metro, Ópera)* and **Trapsatur** *(C/ San Bernardo 23, ☎ 91 541 63 20, Metro, Santo Domingo)*. Just don't expect these tours to come cheap.

The Madrid Card

If you plan to scour as much of Madrid as humanly possible in a couple of days, this card might be the ticket. After purchasing it in one- , two- or three-day increments (28€, 42€ and 55€) you will have hassle-free admission to public transport, 40 major museums, the Madrid Vision "on-off" tour bus, a guided tour of the old city on Saturdays and an advertisement-laden guidebook with information about the city and some discount coupons to Subway and TelePiza. Buy the card at municipal or regional tourism offices, on the Madrid Vision bus, at its kiosk next to the Prado museum, or online at www.madridcard.com/en.

TOURIST TIP

Maps of the city, as well as information on popular routes and monuments, can always be had for free at any of the tourism offices. But if you're not near the tourism office and find yourself, for lack of a better word, LOST! – just do what I do and stop in at the nearest hotel. Ask the desk attendant for a map of the city (*un plano de la ciudad*); if you're friendly, he or she will likely be happy to oblige.

Another good way to get your bearings in this city is via **Madrid Vision** *(☎ 91 765 10 16; www.madridvision.com)*, a topless double-decker bus that makes rounds through the city along three routes: *moderno*, *histórico* and *monumental*. Stay on and learn the lay of the land, or hop on and off at any given stop to visit sights of interest. Just mind the tree limbs on the upper-deck, and don't expect much good information from the drone speaking through the headphones as the sights passing by don't usually correspond with the commentary. Adult tickets cost 9.62€ for a one-day pass and 4.81€ for children under seven.

Internet Cafés

Navegaweb (Gran Vía 30) is cheap and fast at 1.20€ per hour, but closes at 11 pm. **BBIG Internet & Games** (C/ Alcalá 21) is near to Sol and stays open until 2 am on Fri. and Sat. Every other day it is open from 9 am-midnight. The building space is shared by a Starbucks. Smokers will find these two Internet places unappealing. I've chosen them not because they are corporatized and therefore have rules, but because they have new equipment with *alta velocidad* Internet and are clean and cush. There is no shortage of smaller, dingier, slower and usually more expensive Internet cafés in Madrid. Ask someone (everyone uses the word *Internet* these days) and they might just escort you there.

Important Contacts

Emergencies: ☎ 112.

Police: **Municipal**: C/ de los Madrazo 9, ☎ 91 541 71 60 or 092; National ☎ 091; Guardia Civil ☎ 91 457 77 00.

Medical Emergencies: ☎ 061.

Red Cross: ☎ 91 522 22 22.

Hospital: Anglo-American Medical Unit, C/ Del Conde de Aranda 1, ☎ 91 435 18 23.

Firehouse: ☎ 080.

Town Hall: ☎ 010.

Post Office (*Correos*): Palacio de Comunicaciones, Plaza de Cibeles, C/ Alcalá 51, ☎ 90 219 71 97; open 8 am-midnight.

Lost and Found: ☎ 91 588 43 46.

Outdoor Companies

Sportnatura *(Avda. Donostiarra, 4 ☎ 91 403 61 61, www.sportnatura.es)* specializes in guided canoeing (15€ half-day; 30€ full-day) and climbing excursions (12€) in the Madrid region and beyond.

Adrenalin Sport *(C/ Serrano 141, ☎ 91 411 75 65, fax 91 561 38 60, www.adrenalin-extreme.com)* is known for its raging bungee jump sessions off canyon bridges in the surrounding area (19-21€); they are also willing to organize trips for just about anything, from rapelling to nature walks and climbing.

Esto es Madrid Aventuras en Mountain Bike *(C/ Torpodero Tucumán 18, ☎ 91 350 11 60, www.esoesmadrid.net)* organizes mountain biking trips in the region. A fee of 15-33€ includes transportation, lunch and a guide.

Tierra de Fuego *(C/ Pizarro 20, ☎ 91 521 52 40, fax 91 523 41 65)* leads two hiking excursions to the Sierra de Guadarrama, during the last week of every month. On many of these trips parents are encouraged to bring their children, ages four to 12, for whom outdoor games are organized and supervised while the parents enjoy their own adventures.

Sporting Federations

For extensive information on a particular sport, contact one of these national sporting clubs, all of which are based in Madrid.

Mountain Exploration and Climbing: Federación Española de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada *(C/ Floridablanca 15, ☎ 93 426 42 67, www.fedme.es).*

Spelunking: Federación Española de Espeleologia *(C/ Ayala 160, ☎ 91 309 36 74, federación@fedespeleo.com)*.

Canoeing: Federación Española de Piragüismo *(C/ Antracita 7, ☎ 91 506 43 00, www.sporttec.com/fep).*

Rowing: Federación Española de Remo *(C/ Núñez de Balboa 16, ☎ 91 431 47 09, www.federemo.org).*

Motor Boating: Real Federación Española de Motonáutico *(Avda. América 33, ☎ 91 415 37 69, motonautica@infonegocio.com)*.

Sailing: Real Federación Española de Vela *(C/ Louis de Salazar 9, ☎ 91 519 50 08, www.rfev.es).*

Flying sports: Real Federación Aeronáutica Española *(Carretera de la Fortuna, ☎ 91 508 29 50, fae@mad.servicom.es).*

Cycling: Real Federación de Ciclismo *(C/ Ferraz 6, ☎ 91 540 08 41, www.rfec.com).*

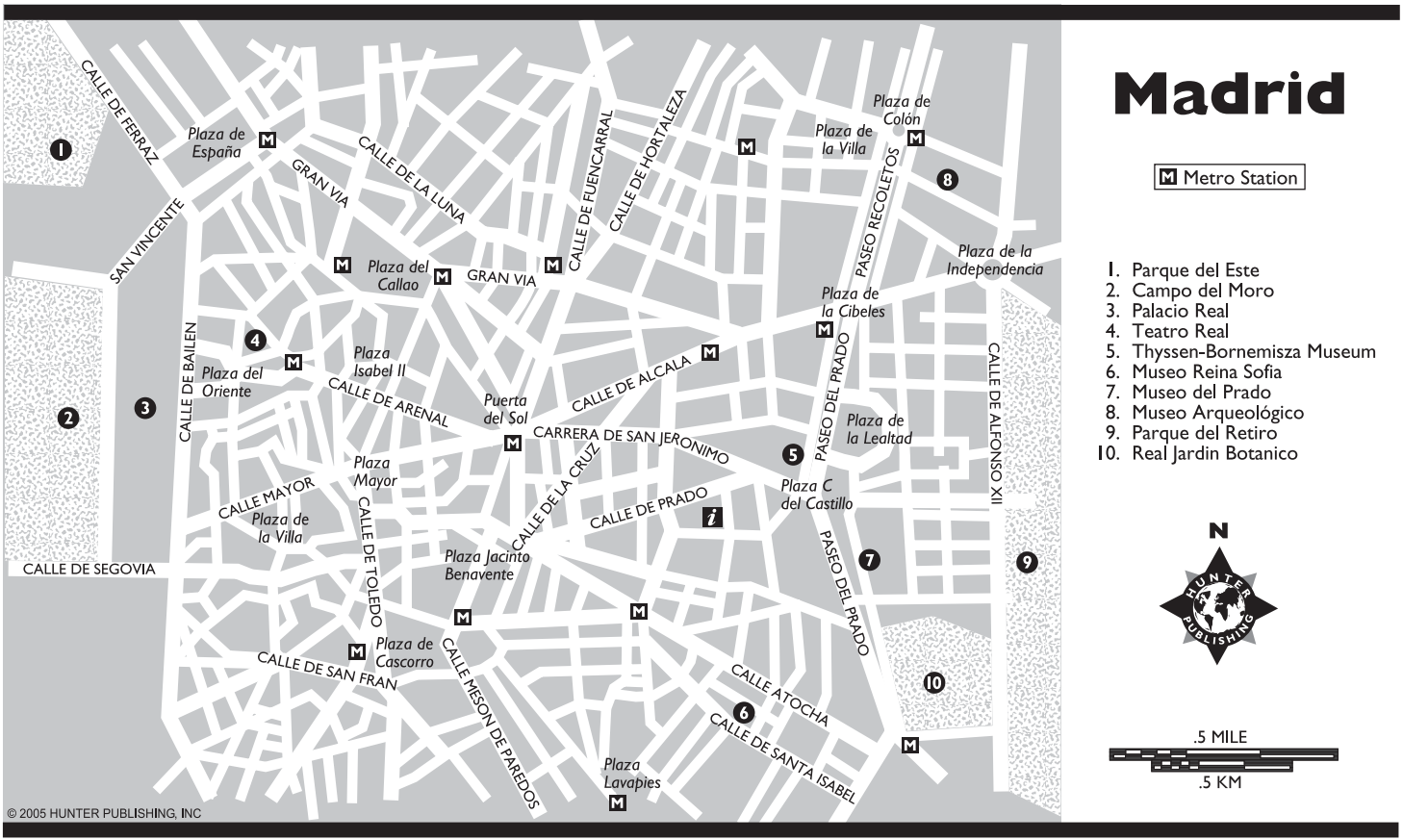
Winter sports: Real Federación Española de Deportes de Invierno *(C/ Arroyofresno, chalet 3-A, ☎ 91 376 99 30, secretario@rfedi.es).*

Archery: Real Federación Española de Tiro con Arco *(C/ Núñez de Balboa 13, ☎ 91 577 36 32, www.federarco.es).*

Horseriding: Real Federación Hipica Española *(Plaza del Marqués de Salamanca 2, ☎ 91 577 78 92, www.rfhe.com).*

MADRID'S MIRACLE

San Isidro Labrador (the Farmer) was a 12th-century peasant noted for his generosity towards the poor, impeccable Christian ideals and numerous miracles; he was canonized in 1622 and became the patron saint of Madrid. San Isidro was the only saint ever to have married a fellow saint, Santa María de la Cabeza.



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■ Orientation

Madrid is large but manageable. The major points of interest are located within a relatively confined area bordered in the west by the **Palacio Real** (Royal Palace) and in the east by the wide avenue known as the **Paseo del Prado**. The three major museums are situated around the Paseo del Prado, while just to the east of it is the **Parque del Retiro** and the chance for a perfectly relaxing reprieve from the hyperactive city life. Following the Paseo del Prado north, it comes to be called the **Paseo de los Recoletos**, which is of less interest to most tourists; it is sided by tall office buildings housing many of the country's most prominent businesses. Recoletos passes by the upscale grid of the Salamanca district in the northeast of the city, popular for its designer shopping appeal and polished restaurants.

West of the Paseo del Prado is the neighborhood known as **Huertas**, a traditional literary haunt and home to numerous cafés and *tapas* bars. Huertas merges with the crowded **Puerta del Sol**, which is the heart of the city and, for that matter, the country, with roads radiating off in all directions and people doing the same. From here, a number of pedestrian streets funnel crowds northward between department stores and boutique shops to the **Gran Vía**. This main commercial street runs east-west with theaters and less-than-appealing eateries spanning the length of it.

Immediately north of the Gran Vía are the trendy, trashed areas known as **Malasaña** and, just east of it, **Chueca**, both loaded with raging clubs, hip sipping spots and cheaper shopping choices than that of Sol or Salamanca. To the south and west of the Puerta del Sol is the area generally referred to as **Hapsburg Madrid**, with its ever-popular **Plaza Mayor**. South of it is **La Latina**, full of character and creativity and within sight of **El Rastro** flea market, along with many of Madrid's most traditional restaurants.

Farther south is the white-collar *barrio* called **Lavapiés**. Northwest of the Plaza Mayor is the oldest district of Madrid, originally a Moorish quarter known as **Morería** and, finally, the **Palacio Real**, the grandest vestige of Habsburg Madrid in the area known as Ópera.

THE MADRIDS

Each of Madrid's *barrios* is credited with its own unique style and appeal, which is why the locals refer to them as "Los Madriles" – the Madrids.

■ Sightseeing

A Walk through Essential Madrid

Tie on the walking shoes and make tracks for the **Puerta del Sol**. The "Gateway to the Sun" takes its name from, quite naturally, a gate (upon which, tradition has it, a sun was depicted) that once stood as part of a 15th-century defensive bulwark isolating the old city from its outlying communities. The city walls have long since been torn down, but the Puerta still serves in much the same capacity as it did in times gone by – as a main transportation hub where, instead of the buses and taxis

of today, stagecoaches once departed to the outlying provinces. Its central role in the community and country meant that it was always first in line to receive the latest urban improvements (gas lanterns, beast trams, electric streetcars). With roads trailing off in all directions, it is little wonder that the Puerta has repeatedly played host to riots and protests (the most recent war in Iraq saw as many as 50,000 people packed defiantly around it on a weekly basis).

Today the half-moon-shaped plaza is loomed over by government buildings and surrounded by cafés, souvenir stores and *heladerías* (ice cream shops). The statue of Carlos III in the center honors the man credited with giving the city a much-needed face lift, but we will return to him at the close of this tour. For now, take note of the bronze and stone statue known as **Oso y Madroño**, or bear and berry tree, which is the city's emblem. Before heading down Calle Mayor, stop in at **La Mallorquina**, the classic café and pastry shop on the corner. Though the place is dependably crowded, don't be dissuaded; it is efficiently serviced (a rarity in Spain) by an eager staff clad in traditional white uniforms that roams tirelessly behind the counters. Order a flaky *palmera* or a chocolate-filled *napolitina para llevar* (to go), or climb the stairs to the second-floor cafeteria for a coffee and view of the busy Puerta del Sol below.

Plaza Mayor

Heading down Calle Mayor a few blocks, stop at the *kiosco* (news stand) to pick up the day's paper for reading material at the following stop. Make the next left, passing through one of the nine archways that lead into the **Plaza Mayor,** the foremost example of Habsburg Madrid. This main square is one of Spain's two beloved (Salamanca's being the other) and was designed by Juan Gómez de Mora as ordered by Felipe III, whose equestrian statue stands in the center. The rectangular plaza, with its expansive, stone-paved footing, is surrounded by a five-story façade topped with steeples and lined with balconies, under which is a shaded ground floor arcade housing knick-knack shops and restaurants. To read the paper, have a seat at one of the hundreds of café tables lining the periphery – other than your preference for sun or shade, it doesn't matter which restaurant you choose, as the food and prices vary little from one to the next (all are equally pricey).

Now imagine the Plaza as it once was, a crowded city marketplace desperately in need of a cleaning, as a make-shift bull rink lined with bleachers stuffed with thousands upon thousands of spectators eager to see the nobleman on horseback prevail over the beast. On lighter days, Saints were canonized here, kings proclaimed and fireworks set off. During its darkest period, the ghastly affairs of the Inquisition unfolded within. It's hard to imagine that where the Peruvian band is playing so happily over there, a garotte was once being prepared and the condemned nervously savoring his last few breaths. On one infamous day in June of 1680, a bloodthirsty crowd endured an elaborate 14-hour spectacle in which over 100 criminals were paraded

around and ultimately sentenced. The affair was set in motion by the maniacal and generally lackadaisical Carlos II, who decided to host this *auto de fé* to relieve the city's over-crowded jails. While some of the criminals escaped with lesser sentences, such as lashings or extended jail time, 19 of the least fortunate were condemned to death and burned at the stake, much to the restless crowd's approval.

Snap back into the 21st century and notice the **Casas de la Panadería** (Bakery House), immediately striking for the nudity of its colorful fresco-adorned façade, painted during the 1990s. At the other end of the square is **La Carnicería**, a former butcher shop now housing the municipal offices. Toss the paper away and head out the southeastern side of the Plaza through the Arco de Cuchilleros, but not before stopping in the low-ceilinged **Las Rejas Mesón** *(C/ Escalerilla de Piedra 2)* for a *tapa*. It's just one of many *tabernas* filling the caves beneath the Plaza Mayor. Continue past the pubs and eateries of Calle Cuchilleros (traditionally the street of the cutlery) to arrive at **Plaza de Puerta Cerrada**.

A mesón *is a traditional Spanish tavern.*

OPTIONS, OPTIONS

Before turning right onto Calle Sacramento, consider a detour by heading down the street known as **Cava Baja**. Breathe in the smells filtering out of the typical restaurants along both sides of the street. At the end, take in the great view of the **Basilica de San Francisco el Grande**, completed in 1776 at the behest of Carlos III and worth a visit to see Goya's work in the interior. Just around the corner is another relic of Habsburg Madrid, the **Catedral de San Isidro el Real**, which served as a main place of worship until the Catedral Nuestra Señora de la Almudena was finally finished a few years ago and despised ever since.

From the Plaza de Puerta Cerrada, follow Calle Sacramento through the medieval area to the **Casa de Cisneros**, a restored 16th-century palace dedicated to the respected cardinal. Make a right just before it to enter the striking **Plaza de la Villa** just off Calle Mayor, a perfect example of medieval Madrid. On the left is the **Casa de la Villa**, designed by Mora in 1640 to house the Town Council and Jail. To the right is the 15th-century **Palacio y Torre de Lujanes**, one of the oldest surviving buildings in the city and where it is said King Francis I of France was held prisoner in the aftermath of the Battle of Pavia. Returning to Calle Mayor, hang a right to visit the **Mercado de San Miguel,** once a dingy, roofless meat market that today is covered and packed with fresh produce, fish and meats. Stock up for a citified picnic as the walk leads into Bourbon Madrid.

Cross the street and follow Calle Santiago to the splendid Plaza de Oriente fronting the **Palacio del Oriente**, otherwise known as the **Palacio Real**. The Plaza itself is the product of Napoleon's demolition-happy brother Joseph, who ordered the area cleared of some 50 houses, convents, and at least one church and library. His efforts, during the short time his reign interrupted the Bourbons, earned him the moniker, *El Rey de las Plazuelas* (King

Palacio Real

of the Small Plazas). Construction of the Palacio Real in all its Neoclassical immensity, was begun in 1737 under Felipe V of the Bourbon dynasty, three years after the Moorish *alcázar* (fortress) that previously occupied the space was destroyed by fire on Christmas night. An Italian architect was commissioned for the task of creating this, the grandest European palace. The granite and limestone was painstakingly hauled in from the Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains, and when the project was finally completed under a succeeding Italian (Felipe V did not live to see his vision come to life), it amounted to over 2,000 rooms, the bulk of which remain unfinished to this day. Where it is accessible, the Palace is lavishly decorated with tapestries, porcelains, chandeliers and paintings; its rooms correspond to various themes such as the throne room, the rooms of the Real Oficina de Farmacia, with their endless array of tonics and royal medicines, and the Real Armería, displaying a vast collection of armor and weapons from the 16th and 17th centuries, including the swords of notable conquistadores. The Palace served as the royal residence until 1931, when Alfonso XIII abdicated the throne (his room remains as he left it). Today it only sees King Juan Carlos (who prefers to live outside the city at the Zarzuela Palace) during royal ceremonies. *(Calle de Bailén, ☎ 91 542 00 59, Metro, Ópera; open summers Mon.-Sat., 9 am-6 pm, Sun., 9 am-3 pm; winters Mon.-Sat., 9:30 am-5 pm, Sun., 9 am-2 pm; admission 6€ or 3€ for students.)*

Having visited the palace, a drink on the patio of the Café Oriente is in order before heading down C/ Carlos III for the return trip. You'll pass the **Teatro Real**, which is just across the plaza from the palace, and then **Plaza Isabel II**. The theater was ordered built by Queen Isabel II and was remodeled in 1997 as the city's opera house. From here, Calle del Arenal leads back to our starting point, but not before a quick stop at the **Chocolatería de San Gines** (near the church of the same name) for a steaming treat of *churros con chocolate*. Yes, it's a tour high in calories, but you're on vacation! And finally, back to the Puerta del Sol where the spirit of Carlos III (1759-88) lives on. The Madrileños fondly refer to him as *el alcalde mejor, El Rey* (the city's best mayor, the King), on account of the extensive urban renewals implemented during his reign, creating parks and fountains and beautifying the city. His statue faces the old Casa de Correos (Post Office), built under his watchful eye and now occupied by the *gobernacíon* (Ministry of the Interior). Look up. Atop this building is the well-known tower added in the 19th century with its four-sided clock. Each New Year's Eve the Madrileños pile into Puerta del Sol and usher in the New Year by eating 12 grapes, one for each chime of the clock. To do so, it is said, is to bring good luck in the coming year. Now look

down and you will see the marker for *kilometro zero*, the point from which all road distances in Spain are measured and where this tour concludes.

The Museum District & Parque Retiro

"Madrid is where one learns to understand." Ernest Hemingway, *Capital of the World*

Penny Pinching

The three major museums are all within a short walking distance of one another. To visit all three and save a few euros, purchase the Paseo del Arte ticket (8 €) at any of their respective ticket offices.

El Museo del Prado

The Prado is Spain's most coveted art museum as well as its most visited, and no doubt the highlight of any trip to the city. Notwithstanding its formidable collection of works by the Italian and Flemish schools and, to a lesser extent, the French, the Prado boasts the greatest selection of Spanish masters in the world; a few days alone could be spent admiring the rooms devoted to Goya, Velazquez, El Greco and many others.

The foundation of the collection, which today numbers over 7,000 paintings (of which space is currently available to show only a fraction, with controversial plans for expansion projects nearing completion on the Prado as well as Madrid's other two major museums), reflects the private acquisitions of the Spanish ruling class under a succession of rulers. Ferdinand VII was responsible for bringing all of the collections together under one roof in what was previously the Museum of Natural History and Academy of Science, built in 1785 under the guidance of Juan de Villanueva. In 1819 the building was converted into the Royal Museum of Painting and Sculpture and in the ensuing years, the collection has continued to expand.

The Habsburg and Bourbon monarchs are credited with the greatest contributions: Carlos V (1516-56) was an avid collector of **Titian** (1477-1576), whose depictions of the king and his successor are not without high merit. Felipe II (1556-98) expanded upon his father's collection and added the lurid works of **Rubens** (1599-1660) and **Hieronymus Bosch** (1450-1560), whose whimsical *Garden of Delights* is for many the most pleasing work on show. It is composed of a central canvas flanked by two unfolding wings, all awash with beasts and strange manifestations of sexual indulgence; not surprisingly, it is credited as the precursor to Surrealism.

The third major collector was Felipe II's grandson, Felipe IV (1621-65), whose court painter **Diego Velázquez** contributed a wealth of his own paintings when he wasn't dispatched to Italy with the charge of purchasing art on behalf of the crown. When the museum's Sala de Velázquez was inaugurated in 1899, the American essayist Katherine Lee Bates wrote, "In the Museo del Prado Spain does not surrender to the United States. While we were nailing wolves' heads on Barnstable meeting houses – having no Gothic

cathedrals at hand – and fighting the forest with axe and hoe, the Court painter of Felipe IV was artfully coloring those canvases which, after 300 years, remain the delight and the despair of art." Of the 100 or so works Velazquez completed in his lifetime, at least half are claimed by the Prado, including his masterpiece, *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honor). The work of **Francisco Goya** (1746-1828), court painter for Carlos IV, spans the artist's evolution from his lighthearted depictions of daily life in Madrid to his brutal views of war and the penultimate 'black paintings' (*Pinturas Negras*), accomplished in the twilight of his life and characterized by dark and brooding scenes; the most unsettling of these is *Saturno Devorando a Su Hijo* (Saturn Devouring His Son) and needs no explanation. Goya's greatest works are devoted to the cruelties that arose from the Revolution of 1808, christened *El Dos de Mayo* and *El Tres de Mayo*.

La Condesa de Chinchón, Goya

A number of important paintings are on display by the Cretan-born artist Domenikos Theotocopolous, more popularly known as **El Greco**, though some might argue that his greatest accomplishments reside in Toledo, where the artist spent the bulk of his career.

With time to spare, the work of other notable Spaniards can be appreciated, including Murillo, Zurbarán and Ribera; Van der Weyden is another jewel of the Flemish masters and, of the Italians, there are creations by Raphael and Botticelli, to name a few. Smaller, but no less significant collections satisfy those fond of the French, German and Dutch schools.

(Museo Del Prado, Paseo del Prado, ☎ 91 330 29 00; Metro, Banco de España. Open Tues.-Sat., 9 am-7 pm, Sun. and public holidays, 9 am-2 pm. General entry 3€, students 1.50€. Free entrance after 2:30 pm Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.)

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

What began as a venue for temporary exhibitions in 1986 at the 18th-century General Hospital was permanently inaugurated by the King and Queen (whose name it bears) in 1992. The museum houses contemporary works on the inside and dual glass elevator shafts on the outside, added during the building's overhaul. Visitors have a great view of the plaza as they rise and descend between the floors, the second and fourth of which house the permanent exhibitions. The rest of the 36,701 square meters (408,000 square feet) of space (the curator takes pleasure in noting that the Reina Sofia is "*uno de lo mas grande galerías del arte en el mundo*" – one of the largest art galleries in the world) is given over to temporary exhibitions and mixed-media displays. The museum has a decidedly fresh, youthful vibe, perhaps owing to its large representation of 20th-century avant-garde artists, whose works even a Gen-Xer might recognize. Relocated from the Prado's Casón del Buen Retiro, Picasso's masterwork *Guernica* is the highlight of the museum; it savagely depicts the bombing of the Basque town orchestrated by Franco and

carried out by Hitler's troops during the Spanish Civil War. In 1981 this painting was brought to Spain from New York at Picasso's request that it be returned only after democracy had been restored in the country. Other rooms are devoted to the spatially abstract works of Joan Miró, the cubism of Juan Gris and the preeminent figure of surrealism, Salvador Dalí.

(Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Santa Isabel 52, ☎ 91 467 50 62; Metro, Atocha. Open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-9pm, Sun. and public holidays, 9 am-2pm. Closed Tues. General admission 3€, students 1.50€. Free admission on Sat. after 2:30pm, on Sun. and for visitors over 65 or under 18.)

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Henry VIII, Holbein

Where the Prado's collection is classical and the Reina Sofia's contemporary, the Thyssen-Bornemisza is a varied and largely indefinable assemblage of Western art in paintings, sculptures, tapestries and engravings. In the 1920s, Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza began acquiring his first medieval pieces and later his son added a number of modern works. The collection was 'donated' (actually sold to Spain for a princely sum) in 1993 and put on display in the 18th-century palace formerly occupied by the Duke of Villahermosa. For visitors with little or no knowledge of art history, the Thyssen Bornemisza allows unique insights into the changing perspectives of art, beginning with such early works as *Madonna and Child* by the Master of the Magdalen, then the Baroque of Caravaggio, through to the avant-garde, pop-art and surrealism of the 20th century – namely Picasso, Miró, Kandinsky, Pollack, Rothko and more Dalí. The strength of the Thyssen Museum lies in its ability to fill the gaps of the collections in its neighboring museums. Paramount is the museum's collection of Impressionistic works (Monet, Renoir and Manet) and the movement's post-Impressionist manifestations at the hands of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Degas and Cézanne. To start with the earliest works, begin on the second floor (its works span the 13th-18th centuries), drop down to the first floor, which is largely comprised of 19th-century American art as well as that of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist periods, and finally to the ground floor for a look at the various 20th-century art movements.

(Museo de Thyssen-Bornemisza, Paseo del Prado 8, ☎ 91 369 01 51; Metro, Banco de España. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-7pm. General entry 4.20€, students and seniors 2.40€. Under 12 free.)

Other Museums & Religious Buildings

Museo Arqueólogico Nacional. In 1897 a mysterious statue depicting a rather masculine woman donning a headdress was unearthed on a farm near Elche in southeastern Spain. For years historians have debated its origins (and even its sex). The decision that most have arrived at is that the statue was likely carved by the early Iberians some time before the birth of Christ. **La Dama de Elche** is perhaps the greatest example of early peninsular art

and is housed at the National Archeological Museum, along with other compelling finds from the country. The replica of the caves at Altamira is worth a peek since it takes an act of congress to see the real deal in northern Spain. *(National Museum of Archeology, C/ Serrano 13, Metro, Serrano; ☎ 91 577 79 12. Open 9:30 am-8:30 pm; Sun. and holidays, 9:30 am-2:30 pm.)*

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas. An interior designer's dream, this museum houses a vast assemblage of furniture and decorative art spanning the various Spanish styles (no doubt upper-class) from the 15th to 19th centuries. *(National Museum of Decorative Arts, C/ Montalbán 12, Metro, Retiro; ☎ 91 532 68 45. Open Tues.-Thurs. 9:30 am-3 pm; Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

ADVENTURES ON TWO WHEELS

The many museums of Madrid are scattered throughout the city. To connect them all by foot could take more time than it is worth and one can only handle so much climbing in and out of the Metro. The alternative is to rent a bike and tour around the city. **Bicimania**, *"le megastore de la bicicleta" (C/ Palencia 20, ☎ 91 533 11 89)* rents mountain bikes by the day (15€), the weekend (24€) or by the week (80€). They also organize rides all over the province through their club. Membership is free. Return their bikes from 10:30-2 and 5-8:30. Don't forget to bring a copy of your passport and prepare to put a temporary deposit of 150-200€ on your credit card. For two wheels and a motor, go to **Motoalquiler** *(C/ Conde Duque 13, ☎ 91 542 06 57)*, which rents scooters from 40€ to 100€ per day.

Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales. This research center is home to the country's largest natural history collection. Among its permanent exhibitions are the History of Earth and Life, the Museum's Museum and Nature's Rhythm. Seminars on various scientific topics and workshops are held regularly and are open to the public. *(Natural Science Museum, C/ José Gutiérrez Abascal 2, Metro, Ríos Rosas and Nuevos Ministerios. Open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-6 pm; Sat. 10 am-8 pm; Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Museo de América. An homage to Spanish colonialism, the museum displays archaeological and ethnographical collections from pre-Columbian Latin America and the Philippines – lots of gold, gold, gold. *(C/ Avenida Reyes Católicos 6, Metro, Moncloa; ☎ 91 549 26 41. Open Mon.-Thurs. 10 am-3 pm; Sundays and holidays, 10 am-2:30 pm.)*

Museo del Ejercito. War mongers will love this museum, which traces the history of the Spanish military. It houses a daunting collection of artifacts, including weapons, uniforms, significant documents – in short, all things militaristic. *(C/ Méndez Núñez 1, Metro, Retiro & Banco de España, ☎ 91 522 89 77. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Museo Lázaro Galdiano. Once owned by the wealthy financier, this private collection has no real focus (the Middle Ages, to a large extent). There are Celtic and Visigothic artifacts, a collection of paintings by Spanish and English masters, elaborate clocks, jewelry and furniture – it was, after all, once a home. *(C/ Serrano 122, Metro, Nuñez de Balboa; ☎ 91 561 60 84. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm; closed in August.)*

Museo Sorolla. This former home and working studio of the Valencian painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923) displays his works as well as the work of some of his friends. It's a good way to see the beach in Madrid. *(Paseo General Martínez Campos 37, Metro, Rubén Darío & Gregorio Marañon; ☎ 91 310 17 31. Open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-3 pm; Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. This royal academy was established in the 18th century by Fernando VI to train up-and-coming artists. It includes works by many of the greatest Spanish painters, as well as others by Rubens, Raphael and Titian. *(Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando Museum; C/ Alcalá 13, Metro, Sol; ☎ 91 542 00 59. Open 9 am-7 pm; Sat., Sun. & Mon. 9 am-2:30 pm.)*

Monasterio de Las Descalzas Reales. Juana de Asturia, daughter of Charles V, converted this former royal palace into a convent during the 16th century. She is entombed here, watched over by 26 Franciscan nuns. The monastery is worth a visit to see the elegant Baroque stairway, which is decorated with Coello's frescoes; it also houses a collection of tapestries, sculptures and paintings by the likes of Cano, Titian, Roldán and others. *(Monastery of the Royal Barefoot Franciscans, Plaza de las Descalzas Reales 3, Metro, Sol, Opera & Callao; ☎ 91 542 00 59. Open Tues.-Thurs. and Sat. 10:30 am-12:45 pm & 4-5:45 pm; Sundays and holidays, 11 am-1:30 pm.)*

Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida & the Pateón de Goya. In this small chapel the painter Francisco de Goya is entombed. The dome fresco *Miracle of St. Anthony* was painted by him in 1798. *(Goya's Pantheon, Paseo de San Antonio de la Florida 5, Metro, Norte; ☎ 91 542 07 22. Open Tues.-Thurs. 10 am-2 pm & 4-8 pm; Sat. and Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Monasterio de la Encarnacion. Founded in 1611 by Margaret of Austria, the monastery was decorated by court painters and is home to religious art, including works by Gregorio Fernández and Francisco Bayeu. Inside is a vial of San Pantaleón's blood, which is said to liquefy every year on July 27. It is worth noting that, if the event does not occur, disaster will strike Madrid. *(Monastery of the Incarnation, Plaza de la Encarnacíon 1, Metro, Opera; ☎ 91 542 00 59. Open Tues.-Thurs. and Sat. 10:30 am-12:45 pm and 4-5:45 pm; Sundays and holidays, 11 am-1:30 pm.)*

Basilica de San Francisco el Grande. This imposing Neoclassical church was finished in 1776 by Sabatini. Goya was one of the artists commissioned to decorate its interior, which also houses a small art gallery in the cloister. Worth checking out is the 16th-century Baroque Capilla del Cristo de la Venerable Orden Tercera. *(Chapel of Christ of the Third Venerable Order, Plaza San Francisco. Open Tues.-Sat. 11 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm.)*

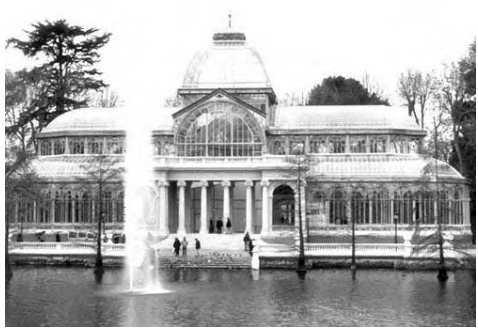
A Sunday Stroll Through the Park

Nothing is so typically "Madrileño" as a Sunday afternoon spent winding down from the weekend thrash on a lazy walk through the sprawling Parque del Retiro (Metro, Retiro, Atocha). The paths leading through this 350-acre park are shaded by over 15,000 trees and teeming with old and young lovers strolling hand in hand, cyclists, musicians playing everything from the didgeridoo to the accordion, jugglers, crafts stands and painters eager to scrawl your portrait and exaggerate those most unappealing features.

The park was originally the site of gardens surrounding Phillip IV's Retiro Palace, but since those days the flower beds, ponds and shaded, grassy knolls

have been opened to the public and the park is now a myriad of activities, with weekend concerts in the open-air theater and puppet shows at Retiro's **Municipal Puppet Theater** (Sat. & Sun. from Oct.-May at 1 pm). After dodging traffic and squinting in hopes of making out the bullet holes in the **Puerta de Alcala** (stark reminders of Prime Minister Eduardo Dato's assassination in 1921), enter the park on the corner at Plaza de La Independencia and keep on walking (or rent a bike inside the park for the afternoon).

Take in the scene as you approach the lake (*Estanque Grand*) and then turn left and wrap around it after feeding the fish, of course. Head toward the imposing monument of Alfonso XII and, if you're of a mind, rent a paddle boat and play bumper-boat in the teeming waters. Afterwards, continue around the lake, crossing the Paseo de Venezuela and stop to see if the **Palacio de Velázquez** is currently hosting an exhibition. Just a short walk beyond is the **Palacio de Cristal**, a large iron and glass greenhouse built originally in 1887 to shelter rare flowers in the winter time and now also a site of frequent exhibitions. Find a perfect spot in the shade and take a load off; then, after your nap, push on to the Paseo de Uruguay. Make a right and find your way out of the park. You are now facing the **Jardínes Botánicos next to the Museo del Prado**. For 1€ you can marvel at a rich variety of flora from Spain and Latin America, a collection originally born out of a vast cataloguing project begun during the Enlightenment period of the 18th century. At the 'physic' garden it is still allowable to collect medicinal herbs. *(Botanical Gardens, Plaza de Murillo 2; open winters, 10 am-7 pm, winters, 10 am-5:30 pm.)*



Palacio de Cristal

The Grass is Always Greener

Besides the Retiro, Madrid has over 40 public parks and gardens. Other popular ones include the stately **Campo del Moro** (Field of the Moor) spanning the hill from the Río Manzanares to the Royal Palace; the **Casa de Campo** (see *Adventures for the Whole Family*, page 101), once a royal hunting ground; and the **Parque del Oeste**, with its curious fourth-century BC Temple of Debod. The ancient Egyptian relic was given to Spain in gratitude for its contribution to the construction of the Aswan Dam. It was reassembled on a hill overlooking the river, with terrific panoramic views of the city.

Fiestas & Celebrations

If there is one month to visit Madrid, it is May. Bookworms will appreciate the city's annual book fairs held during this month, including the **Fería del Libro de Madrid** in the Retiro Park (at which the nation's most important publishers converge), the **Fería del Libro Antiquo y de Ocasión** along the Paseo de Recoletos (old and used books) and the **Fería del Libro sobre Madrid** in the Plaza de Isabel II (books about the city). On the second of this month, the **Fiestas del 2 de Mayo** mark the popular uprising and subse-

quent executions of 1808 (which Goya portrayed in his painting *Dos de Mayo*) with concerts, open-air dancing and sporting events.

The month-long celebrations of the **Fiestas de San Isidro** begin on May 15th in honor of the city's patron saint. According to tradition, a pilgrimage (*romería*) is made to the saint's meadow to drink from the healing waters in the fountain of the hermitage. You'll notice the traditional Castizo dress here and there, and the concerts in the Plaza Mayor offer a pleasant, if somewhat crowded, way to spend the evening. Don't hesitate to try the traditional sweets for sale at one of the numerous stands such as *rosquillas de anis* (anise-flavored doughnuts). Around the same time the famous **Fería Taurina** kicks off and carries on through June at the Plaza Monumental Las Ventas bullring, where bullfights are held each day during the celebrations.

■ Shopping

Despite the rising popularity of all-in-one department stores, the traditional door-to-door shopping experience can still be had in many small, cluttered specialty shops scattered in the areas of the Puerta del Sol and Plaza Mayor. Stop in at **Casa de Diego**, founded in 1858 (Puerta del Sol 12), and buy a typically Spanish hand-painted fan (7€ to keep you cool during the stifling summer) for the trip down Calle Mayor. Along the way, the devout will find window shelves crowded with handmade religious trinkets, while the musically inclined can pull one of **Manuel González Contreras**' classical guitars off the shelf and strum away at C. Mayor 80 (a guitar that costs 800€ here sells for $5,000 in the States!).

After passing the notorious Casa Ciriaco at Mayor 84 (see *Places to Eat*, page 110), take a right and step into **El Torno** to sample *dulces de convento*, traditional sweets made by the nuns of Madrid. Or, for a heartier snack, backtrack to the **Mercado de San Miguel**, which, at the turn of the 20th century was an open-air meat market. With renovations and a new roof, the market is a fun place to roam around and buy fresh food. **Capas Seseña** (C/ Cruz 23) is a locally notorious maker of pricey woolen capes. Since 1901 the boutique has sewn for the famous, including at least one controversial New York senator. Follow C/ Cava Baja south from the plaza to **Corchero Castellano** at #47, the sign for which reads *manufactura del corcho en general - fundado en 1881*. In this unique shop all things imaginable are fashioned from cork, including dressers and cabinets, wallets and even umbrellas.

To go **antiquing**, hit **El Rastro** flea market on Sundays (see below) and if you strike out there, try the adjoining streets of Velázquez, Claudio Coello and Jorge Juan, as well as the **Antique Center** on Calle Lagasca. Art fans will find around 150 **fine-art galleries** in Madrid, most of them in the areas of Calle Barquillo, near the Centro de Arte de Reina Sofia, and along C. Serrano, Jorge Juan and Coello in the Salamanca district.

For **high-end designer apparel** head to the Salamanca district, where many top national and international fashion houses are located along C/ José Ortega y Gasset, C/ Serrano and C/ Goya (as well as the shopping center **El Jardín de Serrano**). For that young and trendy appeal, the **Mercado de Fuencarral** on the street of the same name is popular. True shopping freaks can hop onto a mini-bus for the **Madrid Shopping Tour**. For 25€ the willing are bestowed with a complimentary shopping bag and a handful of cou-

pons before being carted off through the major shopping districts of Madrid to the tune of a bilingual guide that does his best to make sense of this rather strange tour. The bus departs Neptuno square at 10 am every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

The major **department stores**, including **El Corté Ingles** and **FNAC**, oppose each other on the streets running between Gran Vía and the Puerta del Sol. The basement floor of Corte Ingles houses the most extensive supermarket in Spain (there is even a Tex-Mex section), while FNAC specializes in electronics. Both maintain well-stocked **bookstores** with plenty of English titles, but for the best selection, head up to Gran Vía and take a right to the three-story **Casa del Libro**.

El Rastro Flea Market

It's Sunday evening and all across Madrid thrifty shoppers can be heard proclaiming, "You just wouldn't believe what a deal I found at the Rastro today!" El Rastro flea market, located in La Latina around the Plaza de Cascorro and C/ Embajadores, has been a Madrid institution for as long as anyone cares to remember. Every Sunday from 9 am to 2 pm, throngs of people eagerly sift through stalls full of coverless books, sink fixtures, worn furniture and ragged clothes in search of treasures. The affair is organized chaos, with the cheaper goods on the main street giving way to various thematically organized spaces on the side streets. It may seem like a whole lot of junk, but just keep digging. In my own hunt, I ran into a retired American couple that couldn't help but comment on my John Belushi shirt (hey, it was Sunday). While the wife examined a piece of what looked vaguely like crystal, her husband explained that in New Jersey, where they lived, they rented out a stall at a local antique mall. Each year they came to Madrid just for the Rastro and, with a wink, he explained that each year they returned home with "a couple, three things and turn a sizable profit." All I had to show for my efforts was a cheap umbrella, the purchase of which had been long overdue. "That's our excuse, anyway," the wife said. Who knows how many priceless works of art have lingered in the dusty attics of Spain until one day they showed up in the Rastro and unceremoniously exchanged hands with someone "in the know." But way back in the 19th century a number of priceless Goyas were stolen from the Prado Museum and some have yet to resurface. One day, just maybe....

The Ubiquitous Street Vendor

Who is that guy sprinting away with the heavy sack over his shoulder? It's the ubiquitous street vendor, and he's most likely just spied a police officer and closed down shop, at least temporarily. Every afternoon these crafty entrepreneurs meet their co-workers (the majority of whom are proud to be illegal immigrants) along the pedestrian zones between Puerta del Sol and Gran Vía to hawk wares ranging from knock-off Ralph Lauren ties (3€) to bootleg CDs (2€) and DVDs (5€) and the occasional handcrafted photo album. In the

time it takes the street vendors to set up shop, lay out their typical square blanket and organize the inventory, they can just as quickly yank the center of a string that is ingeniously attached to the four corners of the blanket (hence the sack) and disappear around the corner. It's the classic game of cat and mouse. As one Cataluñan explained it to me, the illegal immigrants really have nothing to fear (other than their inventory being confiscated). If they receive a citation it only means that they don't have to worry about being deported for at least a year since the Spanish court system is so back-logged. As for street shoppers, there is little more to fear than a faulty CD or a poorly fitting pair of "Ray Ban" sunglasses.

■ Adventures on Water

Madrid is notorious for its scorching summers (flies don't even fly). So, in the afternoon when it's hot as hell and the stores are all closed, head to the nearest swimming pool to cool off. The **Instalacion Deportiva del Canal de Isabel II** *(Avenida Islas Filipinas 54, ☎ 91 555 45 15)* is open to the public for a meager 3€ a dip. Or try the **Metropolitano Instalacíon Deportiva Municipal** *(Numancia 1, ☎ 91 459 98 71).* For other public pools, check with the tourism office, which keeps an up-to-date list. A second option, although usually costly unless done on the sly, is to dive in to one of the many hotel pools. A conservative person might recommend that you check with the front desk first as most charge a fee and some don't allow outsiders. **Hotel Emperador** *(Gran Vía 53, ☎ 91 547 28 00)* has a rooftop pool with excellent views of the city. It'll cost you a bundle though.

■ Spectator Sports

Bullfights

Madrid's 23,000-seat **Plaza de Las Ventas** *(C/ Alcalá 237, Metro, Ventas, ☎ 913 56 22 00, 5€-100€)* is the largest bullring in Spain. The season runs from March to October, with fights every Sunday. Posters plastered around town will let you know when the next *corrida* is happening and who's fighting. Tickets go on sale the Friday before the fight. During the festival of San Isidro and the Fería Taurino in May, the best of Spain's bullfighters come to strut their stuff. Las Ventas also has the prerequisite bullfighter museum.

Football (Soccer)

Real Madrid fever sweeps across the country during the season. Each morning thousands of La Marca sports papers are opened up instead of the national papers and perused over a *café con leche*. During any given match, bars throughout Spain will be packed to overflowing with locals cheering – not for their own home team – but for Real Madrid (it's no big secret that the government subsidizes the sizable payroll of the league's powerhouse). Between September and June they can be seen playing at the 125,000-seat **Estadio Bernabéu** *(Castellana 104, Metro, Santiago Bernabéu).* The largely overshadowed Atletíco de Madrid plays at the 70,000-seat **Vicent Calderón** *(Virgen del Puerto 67, Metro, Pirámides).*

■ Adventures for the Whole Family

Rather than walk to the park, fork over a couple of euros and ride the short *teleférico* (cable car, Metro, Argüelles) from Paseo del Pinto Rosales into the center of Casa de Campo, the city's largest park (4,000 acres). It's just west of the Palacio Real along the trickling Manzanares River. It was once a royal hunting ground but is now a magnet for joggers, nature seekers (yes, this is about as wild as Madrid gets outside of its nightlife), tennis players and swimmers. To stay dry, rent a rowboat and paddle around the man-made lake. Better yet, climb down the hill and head for the city zoo *(**Zoo Acuarium de Madrid**, ☎ 91 512 37 80, open daily, 10:30 am-sundown, adults 10€, children under eight 8€)*, with "over 3,000 animals from five different continents!" Don't miss the dolphin shows and the aquarium full of sharks, barracudas and rays. If you're tired, get out before the kids see the city's biggest theme park, the **Parque de Atracciones**, just a short walk away *(☎ 91 463 29 00, open Sunday-Friday, noon-11 pm, and Sat. noon-midnight, adults 20.90€, kids seven and under 11.80€).* Three major zones (*maquinismo*, *tranquilidad* and *naturaleza*) contain all the typical awe-inspiring experiences that you can find back home, from white-water rapids, to walks in a Jurassic forest, waterfalls and the ever-present roller-coaster. Just don't forget, this is Spain and the kids would probably enjoy climbing around the Greek ruins at Empúries just as well.

■ Nightlife

Take note: The **EMT** (Municipal Transport Company) has created a new circular night bus route that serves the leisure areas on the weekends, from midnight to 6 am on Fridays, Saturdays and the eve of public holidays. **N.T.S.** *(Night Travel Service, ☎ 91 535 28 21, www.nighttravelservice.com)* organizes night-long guided parties in the city for a somewhat hefty fee of 120€ per person. That buys transportation, a guide, dinner and entrance into a number of bars and discos, with drinks included, until the sun comes up and the N.T.S. takes you home. They also offer similar tours focused on flamenco (somewhat of a tourist travesty to see in Madrid) and magic, of all things, for 99€ apiece. Sound cheesy? That's Madrid nightlife for you.

Music, Cinema & Theater

In the 17th century, a unique form of theater sprang up as a way of entertaining Spain's royalty. The **Zarzuela**, which draws its name from the royal residence of La Zarzuela outside Madrid where it was first performed, was originally a blend of monologues, singing, dancing and choruses devoted to heroic or mythical themes. The playwright Lope de Vega (1562-1635) was one among many of its notable writers. During the following century the popularity of the Zarzuela waned until it was reincarnated in the 19th century as a lighter, more musically driven spectacle typically focusing on everyday life in Madrid. Among the later classics is *La Revoltosa* (*The Rebel,* 1897), a folksy rendition set in the streets of Madrid and another known by its condensed title, *La Verbena de la Paloma* (*The Fair of the Virgin of the Dove*, 1894), both of which the insightful writer James Michener held as masterpieces of this form. Today, the once-sharp humor of the Zarzuela may seem a little trite. Therein, perhaps, lies its beauty, for the true *zarzuela* has resisted modern refinement and, as such, is an entertaining mix of action and drama that of-

fers a rare glimpse into a Spain long-since vanished. The **Teatro Lírico Nacional de La Zarzuela** *(C/ Jovellanos 4, ☎ 91 524 54 00, Metro, Banco de España)* hosts shows from October to December.

The Teatro Real *(Opera House, Plaza de Oriente, ☎ 91 516 06 60, Metro, Ópera)* is the main venue for opera and ballet in the city. To see the country's top orchestra perform, head to the **Auditorio Nacional de Música** *(National Concert Hall, C/ Príncipe de Vergara 146, ☎ 91 337 01 00; Metro, Cruz de Rayo).* Theater performances are held at the **Círculo de Bellas Artes** *(C/ Marqués de Casa Riera 2, ☎ 91 360 54 00, Metro, Banco de España)*, the **Teatro María Guerrero** *(Centro Dramático Nacional, C/ Tamayo y Baus 4, ☎ 91 319 47 69, Metro, Colón)* and at the **Teatro de la Comedia** *(C/ Príncipe 14, ☎ 91 521 49 31, Metro, Sevilla)*, where the excellent Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico performs. In the fall, check the *Guía de Ocio* for the events of the **Festival de Otoño** and in the summer watch out for the festival **Los Veranos de la Villa**.

The streets of Gran Vía, Princesa and Fuencarral are packed with **movie theaters**. Films are shown in their original language in the theaters around the Plaza Jacinto Benavente and Plaza de España. Another option is the national film library, **La Filmoteca Nacional** *(C/ Santa Isabel 3, ☎ 91 369 11 25, Metro, Antón Martín)*, which also shows films that haven't been corrupted with voice dubs.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

En Madrid, What's On is an indispensable monthly guide to current events in the city. Whether it's shopping, singing or bar-hopping that's on your agenda, it's all inside, along with curt descriptions and hours of operation for many, if not all, of the sights worth seeing around town. The guide can be picked up at bars, tourism offices and many hotels. The Spanish-language *Guía del Ocio* can be purchased at kioskos and has an equally informative listing of current entertainment in the city. *Madrid Ocio y Deportes* is another monthly Spanish publication that is geared to what's going on both culturally and on the sports front.

Night Spots

The evening scene in Madrid is a calm affair compared to the romping crescendo that occurs in the discos around 5 in the morning. The three-story **El Viajero** (Plaza de la Cebada 11) in La Latina district is a good place to start. Take the steps up from the reasonably-priced downstairs restaurant that serves pastas, salads and Uruguayan meats *(open 2-4:30 pm, 9 pm-12:30 am, Tues.-Sat. and Sun. 2-4:30 pm)* to the cushy, candlelit lounge area on the second floor, which has live music beginning at 11 pm. Head to the top-floor terrace, all covered in reeds and vines, for the outdoor bar and tables overlooking the old city. The picturesque Basilica de San Francisco el Grande can be seen in the distance.

Nearer to the Puerto del Sol is **Cuevas Sesamo**, fronted by a nondescript sign and entered through a plain entry hall that opens into the cavernous, multi-chambered confines (which are covered in clever quotes by intellectu-

als, actors and the like). Madrileños crowd the place in the evenings to sip sangria and enjoy the live piano (all except Mondays). For a stiff mixer, head to the American-owned **Manhattan Martini Bar** *(C/ Moratín 5; open weekdays, 8 pm-2 am and weekends until 2:30 am)*, converted into a stylish cocktail bar and run by Paul Collins, the affable former singer of The Beat. The art-deco inspired **Café Central** *(Plaza del Angel 10; open 1 pm-2:30 am),* just off Plaza Santa Anna, is another local secret that plays host to live jazz concerts at night. When the big boys come to play, expect a cover charge.

If you've had enough of Spanish beer or just miss speaking English, head to **Moore's Irish Pub** at Plaza Mayor or at Tribunal. The staff is a young and friendly mix of Spaniards, Brits and, of course, Irish. **Oneil's** in Huertas is one of the largest pubs in town. Downstairs it has a huge-screen TV, great for watching the night's soccer match. If there isn't a match and you desperately want to see a hockey or baseball game, just politely ask the bartender to make the switch. All of the Irish bars carry Rupert Murdock's Sky TV – good for sports, terrible for news coverage. But steer clear of O'Connel Street just off the Puerta del Sol, which has one of the nastiest smelling public bathrooms in the city of Madrid. The place is overrun with American college students and blasted with generisized music. The Poker Band's rather large old lead singer makes for good entertainment though. The sound is cheesy Barry White meets Tom Jones with a little David Hasselhoff thrown in.

In the Wee Hours of the Morning

Soon it will be time to dance the sun back up and in this city there is no shortage of places to get it on. Leave the trainers and flip-flops at home because they are a no-no as far as the bouncers are concerned. Unless you have connections, expect a cover charge of 15€ at discos. The three most famous discos (as well as the most international) are: **Palacio Gaviria** (C/ Arenal 9) with its broad 19th-century spiraling staircase that leads into an antechamber and then a series of rooms all dedicated to a different type of music (and thus a different crowd, which ranges from the old fogies who prefer the pop music and occasionally share space with the younger crowd dancing to the tango just around the glass foyer). There are also hipper house beats to be heard and a lounge or two with a pool table to cool down and rack 'em up.

Joy (C/ Arenal 11) is just a block from Palacio and, like its neighbor, occupies a former palace with loud indifference. A long foyer leads to the main dance floor, above which are two tiers of wraparound bleacher-style seating. But don't expect to sit on one of these upper floors; the music keeps everyone on their toes until at least 6 am. **Gran Kapital** (C/ Atocha 125), the undisputed heavyweight of Madrid's discos, has floor after shaking floor of dancers all looking down on the main stage. Expect smoke machines, laser light shows, and scantily clad go-go dancers working their pedestals to raise the roof. When it's all too much, go make a clown of yourself in the karaoke room.

For an alternative experience, hit up **Cool** (C/ Alcala 81), which has good DJs spinning on Thursday, techno on Friday and on Saturday caters to the gay crowd. On Sunday night, head to **Heaven** (C/ Veneras 2) in Malasaña (which on Thursday night is called the Opera House). It is also known as a gay disco and crazy fun for everyone, with good DJs from 2 to 6 am. If you look indigenous, drinks will cost 6-8€; if you look like a geeky white boy they cost 10-11€. If the buzz hasn't worn off, do the zombie walk to **Queens** (just follow the crowd), also in Malasaña. This place doesn't open until 6 am and

closes at noon. Drugs are more openly prevalent here than usual and it tends to get musty.

■ Places to Stay

In the Center

Liked for its central location but loathed for its charmless interior, the ☆☆ **Hotel París** *($$, C. Alcalá 2, ☎ 91 521 64 96, 85-90 €)* is nonetheless an out-of-towner's tradition in Madrid. Though its rooms were once described by a reputable American writer in the '60s as "dark and confined as any I have ever stayed in," it has since undergone renovations and, while certainly not in a league with the Ritz or Reina Victoria, its prices are reasonable by the city's standards. The staff is very accommodating and has been known to allow overburdened travelers to store their extra bags in a back room while traveling outside Madrid. Head toward the Tio Pepe sign anchored to the hotel's roof as it towers over the Puerta del Sol, then try to score a room overlooking the courtyard, rather than one overlooking noisy C/ de Alcalá.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

If for only a night, the ☆☆☆☆ Gran Hotel Reina Victoria *($$$$, Plaza Santa Ana 14, ☎ 91 531 45 00, fax 91 522 03 07, reinavictoria@trypnet.com, 237 €)* is worth the splurge to watch the bullfighters saunter in and out of the lobby during season. Built on the sight of the Condes de Teba palace during the 19th century, the gleaming white façade glows in the afternoon sun across the Plaza de Santa Anna that is shared by the Teatro Español and surrounded by many of the city's most traditional *tapas* bars. During the 1840s Prosper Mérimée wrote his novella *Carmen* in its halls. The prevailing theme of the hotel is, quite naturally, bullfighting, and this becomes most apparent once inside the Manolete bar (dedicated to the famed Cordóban bullfighter), where stuffed bullheads and arena portraits adorn the walls.

In the pedestrian zone between the Puerta del Sol and Gran Vía, located behind the Corte Ingles, is the Neoclassical ☆☆☆ **Carlos V** *($$$, Maestro Vitoria 5, ☎ 91 531 41 00, fax 91 531 37 61, www.hotelcarlosv.com, 120€ including breakfast)*, a smaller hotel whose 67 rooms have recently been renovated. The Best Western chain has added its name to the stationery and installed crystal appointments here and there along with new furniture, mini-bars and a fresh coat of pastel paint to spruce up the previously drab hues. The best rooms are on the top floor, with access to sunny terraces overlooking the tiled roofs of Madrid. Due to the crowded shopping streets below, a quiet afternoon repose is manageable only in one of the peaceful rooms overlooking the interior patios.

Budget Beds

At C/ Echegaray 5, just east of the Puerta del Sol, a group of four newly renovated hostels is clustered around the same set of staircases. ☆ **Hostal Bianco** *(☎ 91 369 13 32, s 38€, d 47€)* is the nicest of the bunch, but all are a notch above the average Madrid budget accommodation experience – which

tends to be smelly, dirty and dark – and all have television and private bathrooms. **Hostal Residencia Lido** *(☎ 91 429 62 07; s 22€£ d 35€)*; **Angel Escribano Hostal Internacional** *(☎ 91 429 62 09; s 32€ or 26€ without private bath; d 40€, t 50€)*; **Hostal Escadas** *(☎ 91 429 63 81; d 26€)*.

☆☆ **The Hostal Americano** *(☎ 91 522 28 22, d w/bath 42€)* in the Puerta del Sol has seen better days. During the 50s and 60s it was a popular sleeping spot for visiting politicians and notables. Now it's worthwhile only for the third-floor rooms overlooking the action in the Puerta del Sol (and be careful not to break one of the creaky old chairs).

In Plaza Santa Anna, the **Hostal Delvi** *(Plaza Santa Ana 15, ☎ 91 522 59 98, s 24€, d 30€)* is a floor above La Casa de Guadalajara, a restaurant and private club that has a set calendar of events, including literary readings and art exhibitions. It's worth stopping in to ask if there are any empty seats for the night's events, as that's the only way a non-member can take part (and it's free). As for the hostel, the salon and rooms have a cozy, family appeal that smacks of a bygone era. For the true budget traveler, take a room without bath for 18€. Just around the corner is the small ☆ **Hostal R. Las Torres** *(C. León 29, ☎ 91 429 17 04)* with simply furnished rooms that range from 22€ for a single without bath to 35€ for a double with bath.

☆ **Hostal Comercial** *(C/ Esparteros 12, ☎ 91 522 66 30, d w/bath 44€, d w/sink 33€)* has a casual sitting area at the entrance with a gurgling fish tank and a table stacked full of English and foreign language books that hostelers have traded in. Some of the rooms have been renovated, while others, though run-down, have balconies. And it's centrally located between Puerta del Sol and Plaza Mayor. At least five other hostels are in the general vicinity, with **Esparteros** (☎ 91 521 09 03, d 32€) in the same building as Comercial.

Around the Paseo del Prado

Hotel Suecia *($$$, C/ Marqués de Casa Riera 4, ☎ 91 531 69 00, bookings@hotelsuecia.com, s 137€, d 172)* is next to the Círculo de Bellas Artes, just a short walk from Prado and its surrounding museums. The place has been renovated since the 50s when Hemingway stayed here. Today the lounge is dressed up in a curious oriental motif with bamboo furniture upholstered in flowery prints. The theme makes for a light-hearted stay and continues in diminished form into the bedrooms equipped with Chinese armoires. Climb up to the roof and breathe in the artificial grass while admiring the dingy rooflines of Madrid.

☆☆☆☆☆ **The Palace Hotel** *($$$$$, Plaza de las Cortes 7, ☎ 91 360 80 00, s or d 400€)* is one of the two "premiere" hotels in Madrid, with 419 classically-appointed rooms, a host of suites, and a great location next to the Neptune fountain near to the museums. The hotel was inaugurated by Alfonso XIII in 1912 and has played host to the rich and respected throughout its history. AE Hotchner once wrote that at the Palace bar, "every woman looks like a successful spy." Amenities include a gym, Internet ports, various banquet galleries and a lively tearoom sunlit by a glass dome.

And then, of course, there is the glorious ☆☆☆☆☆ **Ritz** *($$$$$, Plaza de La Lealtad 5, ☎ 91 701 67 67, s 570, d 600)*, constructed by order of Alfonso XIII and, owing to restorations that were given precedence over large-scale renovations beginning in the 1980s, maintains its classic appeal. Rooms look out

over the Prado area, public spaces fill with people, as do the two restaurants, the outdoor terrace and the bar. The staff is polished and so well-dressed that the fancily-clad clientele tend to look almost shabby in comparison.

Though cheap accommodations are hard to come by in the Prado area, the ☆☆ Hotel Mora *($$, Paseo del Prado 32, ☎ 91 420 15 69, d 65€)* has reasonably priced rooms with traditional appointments, some of which open up to great views of the area. It's about the best buy along the popular museum circuit.

Budget Beds

☆☆ **Hostal Cantábrico** *(C/ Cruz 5, ☎ 91 521 33 03, s 33, d 48€)* has average rooms that are at the least clean and have televisions. Rates include breakfast. Another cheap arrangement near to the museums is ☆☆ **Hostal Alfaro** *(C/ Ventura de la Vega 16, ☎ 91 429 61 73, d w/bath 40€)* occupying two floors in a typically downtrodden building. The top floor's rooms, however, have been completely overhauled and should be requested as long as they are "*no estan completo*" (not full up).

Nearby is the ☆☆☆ **Hostal Residencia Lisboa** *(C/ Ventura de la Vega 17, ☎ 91 429 98 94, d 42-51€)*. Jose Luis, the proprietor, is an agreeable fellow capable of speaking a few words in English, Portuguese and French. The rooms are nothing special but all have private bath and telephone and can be accessed by a small elevator if necessary.

Gran Vía and Northward

AC Santo Mauro *($$$$$, Zurbano 36, ☎ 91 319 69 00, santo-mauro@ac-hoteles.com, s 241€, d 287€)* is a small, charming hotel occupying the former 19th-century palace of the Dukes of Santo Mauro. An equally small but charming court-garden is well manicured and permeated by flowery scents, complementing rooms that are varied in décor but generally characterized by a spritely modern style implemented by the reputable firm Josep Joanpere. An elegant restaurant serves up pricey meals capped with wonderful desserts in the former palace library.

Hotel Emperatriz *($$$$$, López de Hoyos 4, ☎ 91 563 80 88, fax 91 563 98 04, www.hotel-emperatriz.com, d 265€)* is a sprawling, 158-room hotel located in the fashionable Salamanca district, known for its upper-class residents and high-end fashion shops. The hotel has recently been reworked by the trendy Madrid firm Casa & Jardin, and it no doubt has the feel of a place you'd see in a glossy, four-page magazine spread. The rooms are light and cheery with no amenities spared.

Enter **Las Siete Islas** *($$-$$$, Valverde 14-16, ☎ 91 523 46 88, www.hotelsieteislas.com, d 120€)* through revolving glass doors into a contemporary, cubic-feeling lounge that contrasts with the dingy streets and prostitutes prowling around here just one block north of the Gran Vía. The unassuming rooms are new, adequately furnished and quiet (although the walls are definitely thin), with reasonable prices and a prime location for the traveler interested in the raging nightlife of Malasaña and Chueca.

Budget Beds

Hostal Metropol *(C/ Montera 47, ☎ 91 521 29 35, d 37-42€)* is accented by a candy-apple green paint that in many of the rooms was applied so haphazardly that it sealed the balcony windows shut. Still, the hostel *is* centrally lo-

cated, has free Internet access and is a fine choice for larger groups that want to stay together in one room. The airy lounge is good for a drink or two before heading out on the town.

Crossing Gran Vía, don't be fooled by the glorified room pictures outside **Hostal Residencia La Fontana** *(C/ Valverde 6, ☎ 91 521 84 49, s 25€, d 42€)*. Most are actually tight, stuffy and furnished with either cheap or old furniture. The desk attendant is friendly, though, and in truth, isn't this what hostel living is all about?

■ Places to Eat

"Hemingway didn't eat here." A common sign outside Madrid restaurants

The Madrileños count among their most traditional dishes the *cocido madrileño*, a hearty stew consisting of chickpeas, potatoes, cabbage, turnips, marrow bones and various meats. ***Callos a la madrileño*** (tripe in a tomato, onion, bay leaf and thyme sauce flavored with small portions of sausage and ham) is also common. The ***sopa de ajo*** (garlic soup) is a simple concoction of bread, garlic, oil and paprika that is surprisingly flavorful when prepared by adept hands. Of the desserts, ***torrijas*** (French toast) is common during the spring, while ***buñuelos*** (cream-filled fritter) and ***bartolillos con crema*** (small custard pie) are typical sweets of the winter months. Keep in mind that most restaurants serve their heartiest meals from 1:30-3:30 pm, then close for the afternoon before opening for a lighter dinner between 8 pm and midnight. Many close on Sundays.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

For a truly local experience, head to Lucio Blazquez' **Casa Lucio** *($$$$, Cava Baja 35, closed mid-day, Saturdays and in August)*. Inside this downhome-feeling Madrid institution you're quite likely to end up dining next to a Spanish celebrity (even royalty) and not even realize it; the place is unassuming and reliable for its *patatas Lucio* (spicy fried potatoes with eggs), grilled monkfish, oxtail stews, tripe and sweet *arroz con leche* (rice with milk) to finish the meal off.

La Trainera *($$$$, Lagasca 60; closed Sunday and in August)* in Salamanca isn't fancy with its red-tiled floors, simple wooden tables and rigid chairs (which gives the place an old-world, maritime feel), but it's reputed for its dependably fresh seafood. Señor Gomez, the proprietor, has a booth at Mercamaid, Madrid's largest fish market, and comes from a long line of Spaniards whose stock in trade during the pre-refrigeration days was delivering seafood from the Galician coast to Madrid (to keep the fish fresh, they used whatever snow was available along the way). It's an informal affair, ripe for a crack at an assortment of shellfish, the *salpicón de marisco* (seafood salad) or *lenguado a la plancha* (grilled sole).

The elegant **Zalacain** *($$$$, Alvarez de Baena 5; closed midday Saturdays, all day Sunday and in August)* is a jacket and tie affair, expertly run by a Basque chef (all of the great chefs in Spain are from the País Vasco, so it goes)

and a very attuned staff. The restaurant's name comes from the hero of Pio Barojas's 1909 novel, *Zalacain El Aventurero*. The atmosphere is classy and the menu is a mix of traditional and modern, full of creative temptations characteristic of nouvelle cuisine. Some specialties include *bogavante guisado a los dos vinos con espárragos verdes* (roughly translated, lobster stew in wine sauce with green asparagus) and the *faisana asada en cocot al Armagnac con ciruelas pasas* (delectable roast pheasant flavored with cognac). If the menu is overwhelming, select the tasting menu.

A popular spot among younger or more price-conscious Madrileños is **Albur** *($-$$, Manuela Malasaña 15)*, a cozy restaurant permeated by smoke and ethnic music. In the afternoons, its 10€ *menu del día* is hard to beat; evenings are good for a sampling of *tapas*, while on the weekends the emphasis switches to rice dishes like *paella* and its pasta version, called *fideuas*.

Casa Paco *($$-$$$, Puerta Cerrada 11, closed Sunday)* is located at the head of the well-known eatin' street Cava Baja and, like many of the restaurants nearby, is a classic Madrid affair. The menu is as traditional as the zinc-top bar, with *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup), various *filetes* (filets) and *pisto manchego* (a seasoned stew similar to ratatouille).

Casa Botín *($$$$, C/Cuchilleros 17)* is delighted to be the "oldest restaurant in the world." The interior is a true throwback, with the same tile floor in the dining room and wood-burning *horno* (oven) in the kitchen as in 1725, when the restaurant is said to have first opened its doors. The menu may not have changed either, as *cochinillo asado* (the famous roast suckling pig common in Castilla y León) is one of its specialties and has been around even longer than the restaurant.

A LUNCH SPECTACLE

A gray old man pedals through the Puerta del Sol atop an old blue bike with a round grinding stone crudely affixed to its handlebars. He skirts through heavy traffic so effortlessly that cars and buses and pedestrians seem barely concerned. He looks too old to be carrying on like this, but with the finesse of a man half his age he crosses the street and begins to weave through a crowded sidewalk. In a flash he hops off the bike and disappears inside a restaurant, only to remerge a moment later with a stock of knives cradled like firewood in the crook of his arms. Standing on one leg and balancing against the wall, he kicks the pedal backwards with the other; the grinding stone begins to spin. He shifts the knives all to one arm and with his free hand begins to take the blades to the stone, one after another. The process is over in a matter of seconds. The knives are returned to the chef waiting inside, sharp and ready once again for the afternoon meal. As he pedals away he passes by a group of three or four people in business suits ducking into the restaurant. By then the old man is already at his next stop. Thus the urban food chain carries on, uninterrupted.

Inshala *($-$$, C/ Amnistia 10)* is a chill multicultural café with a green, Oriental feeling inside. Tables are low-riding and walls are draped with tapestries and flush with plants small and large. The menu offers a unique mix of

Spanish, Japanese, Creole, Mexican, Italian and Moroccan food. They're open for breakfast at 8:30 am (a rarity) and during the week the lunch menu of the day is only 8€.

For vegetarian fare, head to **El Estragón Vegetariano**, *vegeteriano taberna/restaurante*, on the corner of Plaza de la Paja in old Madrid *($$, #10, ☎ 91 365 89 82).* They have a no-smoking section (also a rarity) and offer a healthy menu of the day for 10€, which might include *el escalope cordonbleu* (cordon bleu cutlet) or *una ensalada tropical*.

Back to traditional Madrid dining experiences with **Casa Ciriaco** *($$-$$$, C/ Mayor 84; closed midday and on Wednesday)*. A plaque on the wall details the oft-told story of 1906 when a would-be assassin tossed a bomb from a former hostel room above the restaurant. The target? None other than the King himself, Alfonso XIII, who was passing by with his new wife during their elaborate wedding procession. In the bar, drinks come as we like them in Spain, with a free *tapa* (that, on one occasion, was a cold potato salad with tuna); but for a real meal try the *perdiz con favas* (partridge with broadbeans). The King and his bride weren't killed, by the way, although 20 bystanders were.

If in Huertas, **Casa Alberto** *($$, C/ Huertas 18, open 10 am-1:30 am)* can't be missed, with its bright red façade. Inside, it appears as one might expect a restaurant founded in 1827 to be – a narrow entryway leading past a carved wooden bar and a handful of bar tables into a larger dining room, where *rabo de toro*, oxtail stew, and *callos* (tripes) *a la madrilène* are dependably served, with white tablecloths, iron chandeliers and deeply-stained wood all around. The walls are plastered with magazine reviews and newspaper articles, more than one of which tells how Cervantes wrote the second part of his masterpiece here. Another says, *perdérse Casa Alberto sería un pecado* (to miss Casa Alberto would be a sin).

Cheaper Eats

For night-owls there is always **VIPs** ($, just look around; open until 3 am), a less-than charming chain of Spanish cafeterias that are all over the city and all, dependably, bland. For some reason the Spaniards love these places. Nothing out of the ordinary here – *platos combinados* (combination plates), various *ensaladas* (salads) and a picture-list of desserts to crown the meal.

Though far from traditional cuisine, the many **Döner Kebap** ($) restaurants are quick, cheap and generally tasty. I can't help but love these places for their simple, delicious food and it's also fun to watch the servers shave the *cordero* (lamb) or *pollo* (chicken). A typical kebap, shwarma or falafel costs 3€, while a plate with salad and *patatas fritas* (French fries) costs 5€.

The chain known as **Las Bravas** *($, Calle Álvarez Gato 3)* is all about in-and-out service. They specialize in *patatas bravas*, a typical Valenciano dish of French fries in a spicy red sauce. Their sauce was so good it earned a Spanish patent.

Drum roll please... the infamous **El Museo del Jamon** *($, Gran Vía 72; C/ Atocha 54, C/ Alcalá 155, C/ Ecoriaza 1)* is a shrine to the pig, with every cut and quality of its legs hanging from the ceiling and glass counters filled with ham sandwiches, ham croissants, ham and cheese. There is always a sit-down café in the back or upstairs, but most people don't linger too long. Step up to the outer counters to order something to go (all the pre-prepared

food in the windows is labeled, but if you have to, just point, smile and say *para llevar*), or claim space at the inner counters to linger while washing a *bocadillo de jamon* (ham baguette) down with a *caña* (small beer).

There are at least a thousand small dives around like **Bar-Restaurante Romar** *($, Fuencarral 58)*, but few serve as deliciously cheap a *bocadillo* (with fried calamari, 1.50€) or a huge plate of *paella* for 4€! We're not talking the pre-fab paella advertised on flashy poster boards all over Spain that costs 12€ a platter (with one token portion each of shrimp, clam, sausage and chicken), but the real deal, heaped with meats and seafood and, around 2 pm every day, fresh out of the oven. This is the classic working man's bar, with stainless steel countertops and slot machines manned by haggard patrons. It's easy to miss; look on the corner for the sign that says *sidreria y bocadilleria*.

MEETING ADJOURNED

The ***tertulia*** was once a common sight in Madrid's restaurants and bars. Groups of men would gather each week around a table to discuss their preferred topic (some were intellectual groups, others committed to hunting etc.), and as Spaniards are apt to do, delve into heated conversations that could span the course of weeks on one topic. The novelist Benito Pérez Galdós immortalized the *tertulia* in his book *La Fontana de Oro*. These affairs began during the 17th century and were still common as recently as the 1960s. Today the *tertulia* has all but disappeared. Still, passionate conversation carries on in the bars and restaurants with a frequency only befitting of Spain.

Cafés & Tapas Bars

Nuevo Café Barbieri *(C/ Ave María 45)* is the kind of place travelers hope to find because it feels, well, authentic. On the outside there is little that would recommend it; paint is peeling, windows are clouded. The inside is not much better, with dingy mirrors everywhere and wobbly old tables. But to sit down for an afternoon drink, conversation and big band sounds it doesn't get much better.

Café de Gijon *(Paseo de Recoletos 21)* is another classic component of the Madrid scene. One can almost feel the literary ghosts inside. It has a downstairs restaurant and a lovely outdoor seating area on the shaded Avenue Recoletos (as long as you can handle the occasional waft of exhaust fumes).

VinoTeca *(C/ Cava de San Miguel 8)* in Plaza de Santa Anna has an eight-page wine list with products from as far away as California and Australia. Salchichon (tangy sausage) and Manchego cheeses can make for a nice complement, depending on your selection. Go see Roger. Why? Because Roger's the cool guy at VinoTeca.

TAPAS

To *ir de tapa* or do the *tapear*, as the Madrileños call it, most people head to the streets around Plaza Santa Anna and Huertas. Other good areas are south of the Plaza Mayor and just beneath it along C/ Ciudad Rodrigo. Below are a few of the more traditional suggestions, but to branch off on your own, just look for a *taberna*, a bar catering to the *tapas* crowd. It's a matter of bouncing from one bar to the next with hardly the time to take in atmosphere. Expect to rub elbows and sample food that you're not quite sure about. It's all part of the *tapas* experience.

Mesón Rey del Pimiento *(Plaza Puerta Cerrada 4)* is a personal favorite for *tapas*. Feel free to try one of the fresh green peppers, piled high in the basket on the bar, before they are fried up (but you'll look like a tourist doing so); then order the *pimientos de la casa* or the spicier *pimientos del padrón*. In truth, none of these peppers, which are stuffed with bacalao or mariscos, are too spicy for anyone who can handle mild Cajun food (Spaniards are not fond of truly spicy dishes). The place is packed from floor to ceiling with dusty trinkets, bullfighting capes and porcelain flamenco dancers. Sit at one of the rough-hewn woods seats at the entrance, watch the people pass by outside and order one of the "*45 tapas, productos para picar*" (finger foods).

Taberna de Antonio Sánchez *(C/ Mesón de Paredes 13)* is – if I understood the bartender correctly – named for a famous *torero* who bought the place. Its doors first opened in 1830, which some say makes it the oldest bar in the city. In other news, it was the setting of the book *Historias de una Tabern* by Antonio Díaz Cañabate. Try the tortilla de San Isidro with a glass of the vermouth.

Taberna La Dolores *(Plaza de Jesús 4)* has very good Galician *empanadas* (a heavy pastry stuffed with seafood and vegetables). Restaurante Gallego do Salmon is next to **Meson Gallego** *(C/ León)*, also a northwestern Spanish eating affair (with disappointingly gruff service on one occasion). A *racíon* (which is a larger serving than a *tapa*) of *pulpo gallego* costs 9€ (the going price in Madrid). This is a mouth-puckering plate of fresh octopus served in olive oil, paprika and salt. Stop in at **Casa Revuelta** *(C/ Latoneros 3)* around 1 pm on Wednesday or Thursday to try the splendid *callos a la madrileña* (tripe, Madrid style). **La Trucha** *(C/ Manuel Fernández y González 3)* specializes in seafood, hence the name, which means "the trout." Bring friends along (you wouldn't want to do *tapas* any other way) and share the heaping plate of various *pescaditos fritos (*fried fish).

A traditional Spanish tavern is called a meson.

Magister *(C/ Principe 19; 2-for-1 happy hour from 4-7 pm)* brews its own beer (an improvement on the average Spanish variety) and serves up one complimentary *tapa* with each brew. The staff is very friendly and even gave us a *ración* of seafood salad atop crackers for free.

Naturbier *(Plaza Santa Ana 9)* has seats out in the plaza mostly filled with tourists and also brews its own beer in the basement caves. Beer, good; over-priced menu, bad. Try **Cervercería Alemana** *(Plaza Santa Ana 6)* to

feel like Hemingway sipping a German-sized beer. This old haunt of his is no secret to tourists, so expect crowds.

El Abuelo *(C/ Victoria 12)* doesn't do variety (they serve only two *tapas*), but taste the *gambas al ajillo* (shrimp sautéed in garlic sauce) and you will understand why. Ask a local where to go for *tapas* in Madrid, and he'll probably recommend **Bocaíto** (C/ Libertad 6), but I'll leave that one up to you.

One Sweet Ending

Two places take the cake in Madrid. **Hijos, Sucesores de Louis Mira** is just east of the Puerta del Sol and is an elegant pastry shop with loads of fancy creations, from *turrones* (nougat) to *mazapan* (a sweet almond concoction famous in Toledo). Gaze through the window at the sweets and crystals rotating on the pedestal and then step inside and let your eyes make the decision. The city-famous **Chocolateria de San Gines** *(Pasadizo de San Ginés 11)* is a few blocks away from the Puerta del Sol in the opposite direction. The sign outside reads "open every day, afternoon and night." Here they serve *churros con chocolate* (doughy fritters with thick, artery-clogging chocolate) like nobody's business.

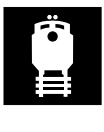
Surrounding Areas & Daytrips

> *"The more evolved a race becomes, the more bored the people are."*
> Pio Baroja*, La Ciudad de la Niebla*

■ San Lorenzo de El Escorial

In the western foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama, San Lorenzo is the ideal setting, stern and darkly magical and just a short daytrip northwest of Madrid. The area was little more than a fledgling mining town when King Felipe II chose the site in the 16th century to build a monastery of monumental proportions that would also serve as the final resting place of the Habsburg dynasty. The King's motivation was twofold: on August 10, 1557 the Spanish had defeated the French at the battle of San Quintín; coincidentally, the victory occurred on the feast day of St. Lawrence, known in Spain as San Lorenzo. The death of Carlos V, Felipe's father, followed on the heels of this victory. Thus the inspiration for the dark, brooding El Escorial at the foot of Mount Abantos, whose name means "the slag heap" in Spanish (owing to the mine tailings then blanketing the area). The project was an immense undertaking initially headed by the architect Juan Bautista of Toledo that sapped the resources of an already bankrupt Spanish economy during the 20 years it took for completion; by then Bautista had died and Juan de Herrera had taken over. Today El Escorial is generally viewed in a more flattering light. It is seen as the perfect vision of the very stern and misunderstood king who caused its construction and, in its bold appearance, a starkly appropriate reminder of the cruel Spanish Inquisition with which that man is associated.

Getting Here & Away



Madrid's suburban *cercanías* **trains** run at regular intervals (20 a day during the week; 18 on the weekends) from Madrid's Atocha and Chamartín stations. The trip takes about an hour and drops you off a good ways downhill from the town. You can hike it in

about 15 minutes, or take the shuttle bus that comes around every 30 minutes or so.

For **bus** services, the private company **Autocares Herranz** services El Escorial from Madrid's Moncloa Metro Station. Buses 661 and 664 depart every 15 minutes.

By **car**, take the A-6 (A Coruña) and exit on the M-505 at Las Rozas, then follow the signs to El Escorial.

Sightseeing

Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial

El Escorial is shaped like a vast, rectangular grid with four severe façades, capped by slate roofs, connected by as many towers and only enlivened by a multitude of windows and the dome that rises above the basilica. It may just be a coincidence that St. Lawrence was roasted alive on a similarly shaped gridiron. Inside, the monastery is loaded with artistic relics ranging from paintings to ancient books to tapestries and it reeks of a history when kings ruled from here before each was ultimately laid to rest in its mausoleum.

After passing the statue of St. Lawrence and through the Grecian columns at the main entrance off Avenida Juan de Borbón y Battemberg, you step into the Patio de los Reyes. To the left is the souvenir shop (with a number of useful books on the area in English) and straight ahead the ticket booth and the **Basilica** (church). The church has 43 gracefully decorated altars with ceilings covered in frescoes by Lucas Jordan. Don't neglect the two groups of statues in the church, which were cast by Pompei Leoni in Italy. On the left is the life-size rendition of Carlos V accompanied by Queen Isabel, his two sisters and their daughter. Opposite this group is the dynamic spirit of El Escorial, Felipe II, along with three of his wives and his son Don Carlos (who, due to his untimely and rather mysterious death, would not live to inherit the throne). From here, the paid tour follows a predictable course led by arrows to the **Museo de Arquitectura**, which has models and dioramas detailing the construction of El Escorial, and then to the adjoining **Museo de Pintura**, which displays mostly 16th- and 17th-century works by the likes of Ribera, Titian, Van Dyck and Veronese, to name a few.

El Escorial

The austere living quarters of Felipe II, as well as later successors Carlos III and IV, are grouped upstairs in the Palacio; but to see their remains, head downstairs to the **Panteón Real**. The octagonal mausoleum is an eerie sight, with tombs stacked in fours all around, the putrid remains of every monarch from Carlos I to Alfonso XIII inside.

Carlos V rests at the top of one group, and beneath him Felipe II, Carlos IIII and Carlos IV. Since the kings generally had more than one wife, only the Queens that had given birth to a child were allowed to be interred in this mausoleum. The surrounding rooms house the remains of the less-fortunate royalty, bastard sons, heirs that died at infancy and so on. The **Biblioteca** is an enlightening last stop, with its cold gray marble floors offset by a brightly-colored ceiling adorned with frescoes by Tibaldi. Hand-carved bookshelves line the walls, stacked full of ancient texts, illustrations, Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts.

(El Escorial, ☎ 918 90 59 04. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-6 pm; Oct.-Mar. 10 am-5 pm; closed Mon. Entry costs 6€ for adults, 3€ for students and is not allowed once the ticket offices have shut their windows an hour before closing time. Guided tours are available regularly in Spanish and less frequently in English for 7€. Otherwise, pick up one of the numerous program guides at the gift shop for around 6€ and host your own tour.)

Adventures on Foot

There are a number of short hiking routes leading off from El Escorial that can be accomplished in the same day as a tour of the monastery. One of the most popular is up to **La Silla de Felipe II**, right, the seat carved in stone where the King used to sit and oversee the construction of El Escorial. The hike takes a little over an hour both ways and is only moderately difficult. When facing the entrance to El Escorial, head right and then make a left, wrapping around the structure along the Paseo de Jose Antonio. Pass the pond that is full of huge carp, then enter La Herrería, the park behind El Escorial. The paseo and pond behind you serve as a good indicator of the direction you will head. Follow the trail directly away from El Escorial as if it were a natural extension of these two landmarks. The hike gets a little more difficult as you make the winding ascent to the seat, which rests a short way up the twin peaks known as Las Machotas. Once at the top, have a royal seat if no one is looking and enjoy the panoramic view of the monastery and town below.

Another, more educational route is to the **Arboreto Luis Ceballos**, an arboretum on the slopes of the Guadarrama where as many as 300 trees from every region in Spain have been planted for research and educational purposes. The hike takes about 1½ hours, both ways. Once heading west on C/ Carlos Ruíz, make a right on C/ Pinar and follow it up a short way to the trailhead, which is marked by a wooden post with a footprint symbol. Follow the trail up a short rise, pass a fountain and at the rock house turn left and follow the road until it breaks to the left and there pick up the trail again. You'll see signs along the way.

The fence guides you to the reservoir of El Romeral. There, follow the steps down, skirting a small chestnut grove before taking the stone steps to the right. Markers indicate the way from here, though at this point it is worthwhile to scout around for some of the glorious views of surrounding peaks and the town.

Then up, up, up the rest of the way to the road and, finally, the arboretum. Once inside, stone paths will help you navigate through the treescape and

small plaques will explain what you're looking at (if you can read Spanish). The center, it might be worth mentioning, takes its name from one of El Escorial's own, Louis Ceballos, who was born in 1896 and spent his life promoting the conservation of the surrounding mountain fauna.

> **Trail maps** for the area, as well as floral and faunal information, are available at the two tourism offices in San Lorenzo, both of which are within a few blocks of El Escorial (C/ Floridablanca 10 or C/ Grimaldi 2).

Adventures on Horseback

Natura *(C/ Monte Risco Alto 6, ☎ 91 890 70 24, fax 918 90 84 49, www.natura.es)* has a stable with horses that can be ridden through the Sierra de Guadarrama near San Lorenzo. Prices start at 10€ an hour per person. Unless you possess awe-inspiring equine skills, you'll be escorted by a happy local who knows the trails in the area.

Where to Stay

Hostal Vasco *(Plaza de Santiago 11, ☎ 91 890 16 19, d 25-30 €)* is in the center of town. The place is run-down, the bathrooms and sleeping quarters aren't all that clean, and a cheap restaurant downstairs perfumes the air with what smells like a dead or an angry skunk and potato chips. **Hostal Cristina** *(C/ Juan de Toledo 6, ☎ 91 890 19 61, d 40€)*, on the other hand, has a pleasant courtyard and freshly refurbished rooms just opposite the bus station.

Camping

Caravaning El Escorial *(Carretera de Guadarrama-El Escorial, M-600, km 3.5, ☎ 91 890 24 12)* is an immense place with space for over 4,000 campers. It is six km (3.6 miles) outside of San Lorenzo, with a restaurant, swimming pool, supermarket – basically everything to make it seem as if it isn't a campground. A *parcelo* costs 13.80€ and includes the price of a car and space for a tent. Solo travelers pay 4.60€, and that again with space for a tent.

■ Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos

The deadly effects of the Spanish Civil War didn't necessarily end with the Nationalist victory. In the 1940s, General Franco ordered construction of what was meant to be a monument to the war and those who perished with it. What transpired during the 20 years of construction was a vainglorious affair for the dictator, a ghastly one for the prisoners of the Republic forced to the brutal task of excavating the subterranean basilica out of solid granite. When the monument of the **Valley of the Fallen** was finally complete, a granite cross, sided with sculptures by Juan de Avalos, rose over 150 m (500 feet) above natural rocky spires and the ostentatious basilica below. Inside, the high altar and the flanking chapel walls served to seal off the many thousand common urns belonging to the Republican (some of whom met their fate working here) and Nationalist soldiers.

It seems that somewhere along the way Franco's true convictions came to light. A tour of the long, cavernous basilica confirms the sentiment; the walk leads past leering fascist angels and prophetic tapestries to the high altar,

behind which Franco's grave is inconspicuously strewn with flowers and, not by sheer coincidence, is the obvious focal point for the visitor. In front of the altar, which is set directly beneath the cross outside, is the grave of another principal leader of the Nationalist movement, that of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, whose Falange party came to embody the fascism of Franco's doctrine.

To reach the base of the cross and better views of the surrounding area without a car, either climb the stairs or catch the funicular (four per day) next to them. To reach the Valley of the Fallen itself, catch the once-daily **Autocares Herranz** bus that leaves from San Lorenzo at 3:15 pm and returns two hours later (6€ includes admission). The monument is open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-6 pm.

■ The Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains

Skirting the northern boundary of the province, the Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains have long been a mixed blessing for the capital city and its inhabitants, who are stranded on the high plain just an hour's ride south. In the winter, fierce northern gales sweep down from the peaks and cast a freezing spell on the city; in the summer, the cool Atlantic currents meet the impenetrable granite rise of the Guadarrama and dissipate, leaving the capital city just beyond in a swelter, what the 19th-century British travel writer Richard Ford aptly characterized as "*tres meses de invierno y nueve de infiero,*" (three months of winter and nine of hell).

The only viable escape for the city-dwellers is to head to the very mountains that cause so much consternation. The Madrileños manage this in droves, crowding the fledgling ski resorts and the numerous hiking trails in the valleys to savor the cool mountain air and open vistas in leisure or in undertaking one of the numerous outdoor sports common in the area.

The Sierra de Guadarrama occupies part of the Sistema Central mountain range that dissects the country's expansive Meseta Central upon which Madrid is seated. It stretches from the Sierra de Ayllón in the east to the Sierra de Peña de Francia in the west. The Guadarrama, which rises to its peak at Peñalara (2,430 m/7,970 feet), can be roughly divided into three zones. First are the **Siete Picos** (Seven Peaks) in the center, which is the most extensively connected by road and rail and thus heavily populated with outdoor enthusiasts. Then there is the **Sierra de la Mujer Muerta** (the dead woman) to the west. To the east is a cluster of rises comprised of **La Najarra**, **Cuerda Larga** and **Cabezas de Hierro**.

Where it is not barren and rocky, the Sierra is rich with pine forests along its northern and southern slopes, dotted with holly and yew trees and colored by wild roses, toadflax, Spanish bluebells, lavender and vast carpets of thyme. Rivers course throughout the region, abounding with trout and attracting otter, badgers, boar, deer, the plentiful fox and scurrying *lagarto verdinegro* (green-black lizard), while countless birds nest here, among them brown vultures, Spanish and imperial eagles, kites, hawks and the ever-present white stork. The latter can't be missed roosting in great, frizzy nests atop the church tower of San Sebastián in Cercedilla (see below).

CAMPERS BEWARE

Camping is prohibited around the Sierra de Guadarrama. Instead, simple mountain *refugios* are common and cheap, but small and generally booked, so plan accordingly.

Cercedilla

This small mountain village is home to 5,000 people until the summer comes around and the population swells to 20,000 or more hikers, bikers and Madrid escapees. From here, a charming narrow-gauge train winds up the mountain to Cotos, along the way connecting a number of popular recreational areas. The town itself is quaint, with crisp mountain views and occasionally dotted with remnants of its Roman past, when it served as a layover post for weary travelers along the Roman road to Segovia. It is still possible, in places, to glimpse evidence of this period, as on a hike between Las Deheas and the pass at La Fuenfría, where the ancient road remains relatively intact, or by sighting from the train station the Roman bridge leading into town. During the Spanish Civil War the area was part of the front line for three years of intense fighting and some of the military bunkers have survived around Peña Bercial and Peñota. It is rumored that, once Franco's victory was assured, the mayor of Cercedilla, fearing certain execution, retreated to his home and there remained hidden until the dictator's death over 40 years later, whereupon he reemerged.

Getting to Cercedilla

By **rail**, from either Madrid's Atocha or Chamartín station it takes a little over an hour to reach Cercedilla. Trains run regularly from 6:30 am-11:30 pm and generally leave at half-past the hour.

By **bus**, **Larrea Buses** *(☎ 91 530 48 00)* service Cercedilla from Madrid's Moncloa bus station. Catch number 684 between 6:30 am and 8:45 pm.

By **car**, take the A6/NVI (A Coruña highway) out of Madrid. Exit at the signs for Guadarrama and, once in that town, take the M-622 another eight miles into Cercedilla. An alternative is to drive the slower, scenic M-607 for 55 km (34 miles) until it meets the M-622 that leads into Cercedilla.

Adventures on Foot

For **trail maps** and details on hikes around Cercedilla and the Navacerrada pass, head to the **Fuenfría Valley Information Office** *(☎ 91 852 22 13)* at the entrance of Las Dehesas park. Or stop in at the town's bookstore (C/ Fortuny 43) and purchase *Siete Picos y Sus Aldredores*, which is a more comprehensive take on routes in the area. The two most popular hikes from Cercedilla are through the Valle de la Fuenfría or up to Monte de Siete Picos.

Puerto de Navacerrada

At the Cercedilla train station, hop on the narrow-gauge train headed to Puerto de Cotos (five trains a day). The Sistema Central mountain range boasts three ski resorts, two of which are located in the Sierra de Guadarrama just a short way from Madrid. Though marginal in comparison

to some of Spain's other slopes and overcrowded on the weekends as the city folk overflow from Madrid, they are convenient if your trip to Spain is mobile-impaired or just a few days. With time to roam, the dedicated skiers head in the direction of France.

Getting Here

From Cercedilla, catch the narrow-gauge **train** to Coto at half-past the hour (as many as nine per day, with the last one returning from Coto to Cercedilla at 8 pm). It stops at Puerta de Navacerrada along the way and is an adventure all its own, winding slowly and steeply through pine forests with more than one breathtaking view of the mountains along the way.

From the Moncloa station in Madrid, **Larrea Buses** run frequently to Navacerrada. The first bus leaves at 8 am on the weekends and at 9:25 during weekdays.

By **car**, from Madrid take the A-6 and follow signs to Villalba, then make the turn-off for Puerta de Navacerrada. This is a beautiful mountain drive that rises gradually through pine forests before reaching the pass.

Adventures on Snow

Puerto de Navacerrada Ski Resort *(main line ☎ 91 852 14 35, reservations ☎ 91 594 30 34, www.puertonavacerrada.com)*. This small ski resort straddles the high border between Madrid and Segovia. Of its slopes, the best are on the west side of the road in the higher area known as *zona alta*. This is where the *mas dificil* red (9) and black (1) runs of the Bola del Mundo are located; the *zona baja*, on the other side of the street, has four short green runs and two blues that make for little more than gentle cruising. Here snowboarders have their own space on Estación, while skiers don't have to complain about the human snowplows on the Bosque. Pick a side for the day or buy passes for both, as there isn't a cheaper combo pass for some reason. Prices are: *zona alta* full day skier 25€, snowboarder 22€; half-day 18€ and 17€; *zona baja* full day skier 16.50€, snowboarder 14.50€; half-day 13.50€ and 11.50€). Either way you'll have to cross the street to make the switch. The resort has eight lifts (*telesillas*), two four-seaters, three two-seaters and three standing cable pulls, or poma-lifts (*telesquis*). For tourists who just want to take in the view, Guaramillas and Estacíon can be ridden up for 4.75€ and 3.15€ round-trip.

Vardesoto *(☎ 91 852 14 48)* and **La Venta** *(☎ 91 852 14 32)* rent skis on the mountain. There are a number of **ski schools**, the main one being **Escuela de Esqui Navacerrada, S.L.** *(☎ 91 852 03 59)*. Their instructors teach all levels and variations of skiing, as well as telemarking and snowboarding. There are also classes for the physically or mentally challenged. Prices start at 30€ per hour for up to two people. The **Escuela de Snowboard de la Asociación Española de Deportes Extremos** *(AEDEsnowboard, ☎ 91 637 52 38, www.deportesextremos-cl.com)* offers an eight-hour weekend course for 75€ and a 10-hour course during the week for 95€.

Where to Stay

The Hotel Pasadoiro *(Ctra M-601 Km 20, ☎ 91 852 14 27, fax 91 852 35 29, www.abartstudio.com/users/pasadoiro, d 50€)*, on the street between the two ski stations, has an appropriately cozy, mountain chalet feel and is the nicest accommodation at the re-

sort. Its restaurant downstairs serves hearty stews and has tables stacked every morning with sweet goodies to give you energy. You'll want to book ahead since the few places on the mountain fill up in advance with school groups and the like. **Álvaro Iglesias** *(☎ 91 852 38 87, s 20€)* is an *albergue juvenile*, or youth hostal, located on the mountain. Rooms are shared by three or four people, some with bath and others without. A reservation is required.

Adventures on Foot

The **Camino de Schmidt** takes its name from the Swiss mountaineer Eduardo Schmidt, a founding member of the Club Alpino Español that spent much time during the early 1900s charting trails through the Cordillera Central. This is a popular hiking route linking Puerta de Navacerrada to the Fuenfría Valley in a gradual descent through pine forests. To reach the trailhead, follow the markers from the lower chairlift. The trail is well marked along the way. It takes a good afternoon to reach Cercedilla, with occasional glimpses of the town along the way and exceptional views of the surroundings from the high point of Puerto de la Fuenfría, the old Roman pass. From Cercedilla, the narrow-gauge train can be ridden back up to the top in a little under 30 minutes.

Trail maps are available and guided excursions can be arranged at the resort headquarters of **Deporte y Montaña** in Puerto de Navacerrada *(☎ 91 852 33 02, fax 91 852 33 02, deporteymontana@puertonavacerrada.com)*.

Rock Climbing

At 2,428 m (7,965 feet), Peñalara is the highest peak in the Comunidad de Madrid and its most popular spot for climbers. The monolith at its summit towers over **Peñalara Natural Park**, a vast, amphitheater-shaped basin carved eons ago by glacial activity. The resulting landscape is a tumultuous spread of moraines, sheer faces and glacial lakes. Laguna Grande is the largest of these waters; along with the Laguna de los Pájaros and the Cinco Lagunas to the east, they are Madrid's only glacial lakes. To reach Peñalara, head to the Casa Los Cotos, a checkpoint and info center for the park in Puerto de Cotos. Trails lead off from here through the park (parts of which were once a ski resort until the government bought the area and declared it a protected area in 1990); the staff can point you in the right direction but you'll want to focus on the area around Laguna Grande and the Zabala Hut, where most of the climbs are clustered. There are no permits or fees required for the climb; it is advisable, however, to avoid the summit attempt during winter, when snow and fog are common, and to check with the office about restrictions. For more information, contact the **Federación Española de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada** *(Floridablanca 15, Barcelona, ☎ 93 426 42 67, fax 93 426 33 87; www.fedme.es)*.

Puerto de Cotos

The last stop on the narrow-gauge rail line, Puerto de Cotos is a small mountain outpost utilized primarily as a base camp for the mountain sports nearby.

Getting Here

From Cercedilla, take the **funicular** to Puerto de Cotos. From here it's another 2.5-km (1.5 miles) hike or shuttle ride to Valdesqui.

By **car**, from Madrid, take the N-VI to Villalba and from there the M-601 through Puerto de Navacerrada to Puerto de Cotos.

Adventures on Snow

Valdesqui *(Paseo de la Castellana 175, resort ☎ 91 852 39 41, reservations ☎ 91 852 04 16, www.valdesqui.es).* The average skier will find more opportunities (hence slopes) at Valdesqui than at the neighboring Navacerrada ski resort. Of its 30 or so runs, the majority are either gentle greens or blues, with a few bumpier red runs down the face of a mostly treeless bowl. As it is a little off the beaten path, Valdesqui tends to see fewer skiers but can just as easily get crowded on snowy weekends. When it isn't snowing, the slopes brown out quickly and the resort has no snow-making abilities to combat it – best to check for conditions beforehand. Lift tickets are 27€ for the high runs (the peak is at 2,280 m/7,478 feet) and 18€ for the lower runs. An afternoon pass costs 15€ (credit cards are not accepted). Unless you bring your own equipment, expect a long line for ski rentals, which will cost 10-24€ and boots another 8€; snowboards with boots are 28€.

Where to Stay

The mountain **Refugio Coppel** *(☎ 91 522 79 51, 16-21€ with breakfast)* is one of the few places to stay in Cotos. It can only hold 26 people so make reservations far in advance of this trip.

■ Aranjuez

This great green escape south of Madrid is nothing less than the perfect excuse to get outside and gaze upon manicured perfection until well after the sun has set. For a string of Spanish monarchs the town was a royal playground where queens often rowed in its rivers and kings crept through the verdant woods hunting deer and rabbit. Each successor appreciated and harnessed the natural fertility surrounding Aranjuez in unique ways; monuments were constructed and then improved upon and the town bloomed in beautiful ways. With its famously maintained gardens and an abundance of lively, gurgling fountains, Aranjuez is an oasis in an otherwise dry, rocky land. Butterflies flitter through the **Jardínes del Principe** that were Carlos IV's contribution; at once expansive and aesthetically stunning along the Tagus River, the park is among Spain's most enjoyable for leisure.

Getting Here

Madrid's *cercanias* **trains** run frequently during the day to Aranjuez. The trip takes 40 minutes.

From Madrid's Esacíon Sur de Autobuses, up to 30 **buses** run Mon.-Sat. and 10 on Sunday.

By **car**, take the N-VI south from Madrid.

Adventures on Foot

If walking in the park, visit the **Casita del Labrador**, a cottage modeled after the Trianon at Versailles with interior art by Velázquez. Felipe II was the first to take interest in Aranjuez and

commissioned his favored architect Juan de Herrera to design the **Palacio Real** here. Subsequent fires all but destroyed the original structure, which was mostly wood, and it took Felipe V to begin construction on the white-brick palace seen there today. Ceramics fill Carlos III's Saleta de Porcelana (porcelain room) and the stately throne room houses art by Sabatini, Mengs and Teniers. The smoking room has Mozarabic appeal, a style that emerged during the period when Arabs remained in Spain after the Reconquest, having outwardly converted to Christianity. The gardens outside were originally planned by Queen Isabel la Católica and designed by a Frenchman in the English style. Its hedge-lined walkways lead past water fountains, sculptures of ancient Roman emperors and statues of Hercules and other mythical figures along the river bank. The Mar de Ontigola just a short walk away is another wet retreat; this small, artificial lake, with tree limbs dipping into its waters and aquatic birds singing here and there, is perfect for relaxation and contemplation.

Adventures on Water

From the Santiago Rusiñol square (unmistakable with its huge fountain), cross the Bark's bridge over the Tagus and make a right to reach the **Estación de Turismo Nautico** and the **Club Escuela de Piragüisimo** (Aranjuez' canoeing school). While the guides won't let you touch the professional kayaks without prior paddling experience, you can strap into a plastic version with one or two seats (it is really all you need on this placid stretch of the Tagus) for a paddle up or down the clear river. The latter trip leads from the bridge to the Casa de Marinos with its **Museo de Falúas** *(☎ 91 891 24 53, entry 3.40€)*, worth a visit to see a large collection of the kings' fancy floats from days gone by. You'll paddle casually along, with the Prince's Gardens shading the way on the right and turtles everywhere, popping their heads up through the water to see what's going on. Tours leave in the morning and then again in the afternoon, once the school has opened back up. Tickets can be bought on-site *(☎ 902 08 80 09; a two-hour trip costs 6€; five-hours is 10€).* A less-strenuous option (not that the other is all that taxing physically) is to hop aboard the **Barco turístico** *(☎ 91 902 08 89, adults 7€, 13 and under 4€)*, a glassed-in boat that looks oddly like a rib-cage floating down the river. The tour is a 45-minute affair with a guide commenting on the flora, fauna and monuments passing by. The departure point is next to Bark's bridge; the boat is in operation from 11 am to sundown, Tuesday through Sunday. It does double duty in the evenings as a floating gourmet restaurant *(reservations should be made by calling ☎ 90 208 80 89)*.

Adventures in the Air

To see the green expanse of Aranjuez from a different perspective, pile into the basket of the city's favorite **hot-air balloon**, a replica of its 18th-century one called the Montgolfiere. If you opt for the unanchored flight you won't know exactly where or how far you're headed because wind conditions dictate that. But you will, nonetheless, see the town upon take-off, just one big sea of green and monuments along the rivers; it looks surprisingly out of place when surveying the dry

surroundings from on high. Expect the trip to last at least three hours. Once the balloon has landed, a 4x4 will pick you up and haul you back to the base for cheap champagne and a cheesy ceremony in which flight "diplomas" are bestowed on wobbly passengers. The balloon takes off from the Plaza de Mariblanca, with two unanchored flights a day, one around 9 am and the other in the late afternoon. **AeroEspaña**: ☎ *91 689 50 51; adults 140€, 10 and under 100€*. They also offer anchored flights that climb to a modest 27 m/90 feet or so in the intervals between the real lift-offs *(6€ and 4€).*

Adventures on Wheels

A lazy tour of the city can be had aboard the **Chiquitrén** (adults 5€, kids 13 and under 2€), little more than a cheeky tourist exploitation but a quick way to see all of the city's parks and monuments. This mini-train, which is a pint-sized version of an old steam engine with wheels and open-air passenger cars, leaves from the Palacio Real frequently and takes a little under an hour to return. For the real deal, consider coming to Aranjuez from Madrid in the **Tren de la Fresa** (Strawberry Train). The train is a restored steam engine that runs on the original rail line connecting Madrid to Aranjuez. It was once used to ship Aranjuez' famous strawberries. It's a short, fun trip, with waiters dressed in period garb serving up strawberries all the way to Aranjuez, where a bus transfers you to the historical part of town for a guided tour of the Palacio Real, Jardín del Principe and the Museo de Falúas. The train runs on specific days during the summer months from April to July, departing from Atocha station in Madrid at 10 am and returning from the Aranjuez station at 6 pm. *(Tren de la Fresa: information ☎ 90 222 88 22; reservations ☎ 90 224 02 02; adults 22€, 12 and under 14€.)*

Where to Stay & Eat

Hostal Rusiñol is in the historical part of the city just a five-minute walk to the palace and the gardens. The rooms are clean and inexpensive; in contrast to the renovated corridor that leads to them, most have yet to be improved from at least the mid-20th century. *(C/ San Antonio 76, ☎ 91 891 01 55, s & d 15-32€, depending on the season and the mood of the manager. Bathrooms are down the hall.).***Hostal Castilla** *(Ctra Andalucía 98, ☎ 91 891 26 27)* is a step up, with a pleasing cobblestone courtyard full of plants and two floors of rooms (also in the process of being redone) wrapping around it. All of the rooms have TV, air-conditioning and bathrooms.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

☆☆☆ **Hotel Don Manuel** *(C/ del Príncipe 71, ☎ 91 875 40 86, fax 91 875 40 75, hdonmanueal@egidohoteles.com, d 80-90€)* has 31 double rooms and two individuals, each with mini-bar, digital TV and appointments to match the soothing blue walls. Bathrooms are sparkling white and well-equipped and there's also a cafeteria downstairs if you can't make it over to the **Bar Don Bocata**, a popular dive with the locals for its hearty servings of *sepia* (cuttlefish).

If you've been away from home for too long or just plain miss the twist, head over to the **Cookery**, a distinctly American bar and restaurant replete with

Route 66 signs, 50s and 60s rock music and a cutout of Elvis greeting you at the entrance (or was it Marilyn Monroe?).

Camping

Soto del Castillo *(Antigua Carretera Madrid-Cádiz, Km 46.8)* is a green camping ground within spitting distance of the Tagus River, along its north bank just across from the city. It has the space for over 600 campers and is the perfect location for river-rats. It has a supermarket, hot showers, swimming pool, cafeteria, gas and electric hook-ups and more. A parcel costs 10.25€; per-person fee is 3.65€ and 3.22€ per tent space. This is also the headquarters for the **Centro de Actividades de la Naturaliza Cámping Soto del Castillo** *(☎ 91 891 43 63)*. They have 10 mountain bikes to rent (9€ per day or 3€ per hour) and specialize in canoe trips on the Tagus (3.60€ per hour; 7€ for a double-seater per hour).

Castilla y León

With the northern half of the Spanish Meseta all its own, *Castilla la Vieja* is unmistakably big sky territory. It is the largest autonomous region in Spain, covering a full one-fifth of the country's territory, and is larger than some EU countries, including neighboring Portugal. The Spaniards born in this sweeping mosaic of tableland hemmed by mountains are credited with speaking the purest Castellano tongue. They gravitate toward the major cities of the region, **Burgos**, **Valladolid**, **León** and **Salamanca**, leaving vast tracts of land empty of all but shepherds and barley growers. They pray in two of the country's three greatest Gothic cathedrals in León and Burgos, study at one of the world's oldest and most influential universities in Salamanca, cast for five-pound trout in the Río Duero and excavate the remains of Europe's oldest inhabitants in the Sierra de Atapuerca. On Sunday afternoon their families gather around tables set with one or another roast specialty of the region and, with clinking glasses of Ribera del Duero wine, chime *salud*.

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The stereotypes of Castilla y León paint but a small picture of this vast realm. Across the north of the region, in the provinces of Burgos and León, the range of the Cordillera Cantabria spreads a formidable buffer to the Atlantic breezes and heavy rains that inundate and color green Asturias, Cantabria and País Vasco on the far side. Across these provinces pilgrims have trudged along the main route of the Camino de Santiago since the ninth century, a period when Christian Spain was in the midst of consolidating its forces to drive the Moors from the peninsula. Burgos would serve as the capital of the crown during the early Reconquest and eventually would be joined with the separate kingdom of León in furthering the cause.

When the new autonomous regions were established in the early 1980s, León, long distinct from the rest of the region, hotly protested its official merging with Castilla. The decision meant that nine provinces would comprise what has long been referred to as Old Castile: Ávila, Burgos, León, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Soria, Valladolid and Zamora. Soria, the easternmost province, is separated from La Rioja, Navarra and Aragón by the Sistema Iberica mountain range. In the south, the Sistema Central separates Segovia, Ávila and Salamanca from the regions of the southern meseta. And in the west, the Montes de León and the Río Duero define the region from Galicia and Portugal.

As a result of its naturally sheltering perimeter, the interior of Castilla y León is a generally arid and highly irrigated land formed by the upper basin of the Río Duero, the country's largest source of electric energy. It harbors little vegetation other than scrub and the hearty holm oak trees. Were it not for the history behind its monumental cities and the ruinous castles scattered in between them, Castilla y León might not deserve the praise heaped on it by one of its own in declaring, "Old Castile is more Spain than Spain itself." Spaniards are, by their nature, a regionally prejudiced lot.

Segovia

Stately Segovia is perched high on a rocky promontory overlooking the rivers Erasma and Clamores at their convergence. In the distance 12 km (7.5 miles) away is the silhouette of the Sierra de Guadarrama, bringing forth a cool breeze that filters through the streets, sending the afternoon scent of Segovia's famous oven-baked suckling pig with it. The confines of the walled city do, as many have claimed before, look like a beached ship. The wedged profile of the Moorish Alcázar, seated precariously at the edge of the cliff, is its bow; the Gothic tower of the Cathedral centered in the Plaza Mayor is its mast; the heralded Roman aqueduct at the base of the hill, its stern. The esteemed writer Miguel de Unamuno (1846-1936), a Basque who spent much time in Segovia, once wrote that the Alcázar "looks like a golden stone steamship sailing through an ocean of wheat."

■ History

This "Stone Ship," as the city is nicknamed, has witnessed the coming of the Celtiberians (before it resembled a ship), the Romans who overcame them in the year 80 BC, a short-lived but impressionable Moorish occupation, and finally, as with all of Spain, the return of the Christians. Under Enrique II (1369-79) it was declared an unofficial residence, and in the year 1474 Isabel, the pending Catholic queen, was crowned ruler of Castile at its Alcázar.

For its key participation in the Comuneros revolt, Segovia endured the wrath of the Inquisition; its cathedral was destroyed in a clash, but eventually rebuilt. Construction of the Escorial west of Madrid in 1561 claimed its once royal populace; the Bourbons, who rejected the Escorial as too Germanic, returned Segovia's status in some measure in the 18th century with the construction of the palace of San Ildefonso east of Segovia. The arrival of the railway between Madrid and its outlying areas spelled the end of Segovia's royal heritage, but eventually heralded the beginning of its tourism renaissance.

■ Orientation

Segovia is a breeze to navigate. In a day-trip or with just one night's stay, stick to the areas between the aqueduct crossing **Plaza de Azoguejo** (at the bottom of the hill of the old city) and the **Alcázar** (at the highest and most extreme tip of the old city). The Cathedral, Plaza Mayor, medieval streets and sights (Romanesque churches everywhere!) and of course great, pricey restaurants are located within this area. You can catch any of the buses from the train station to Plaza Mayor or Plaza de Azoguejo. From the bus station it's a five-minute walk up Avenida de Fernández Ladrera to the Plaza de Azoguejo.

■ Tourist Information

The **municipal tourism office** is across from the Cathedral at the top of the city, *Plaza Mayor 10,* ☎ *92 146 03 34*. A **provincial tourism office** is open at the base of the aqueduct, *Plaza del Azoguejo 1,* ☎ *92 146 29 06*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The train station *(Plaza del Obispo Quesada,* ☎ *92 142 07 74)* is too far away from the city center to enjoy the walk there. Catch one of the regular buses to the Plaza Mayor or Plaza de Azaoguejo. Up to nine trains run to Madrid (two hours) per day.

By Bus: Follow Avenida de Fernández Ladreda from the aqueduct to the bus station *(Plaza de la Estación de Autobuses 1, ☎ 92 142 77 07)*. Buses leave every 30 minutes for **Madrid** (1½ hrs) throughout the day. **Salamanca** (three hrs) and **Ávila** (1¼ hrs) get three or more buses per day.

By Car: From Madrid, the fastest route by car follows the Autovía A-6 (north in the direction of A Coruña) through the Guadarrama tunnel burrowed beneath the Sistema Central. Exit to the right on the N-603 and Segovia is close ahead (96 km/60 miles). For a more scenic route, exit the A-6 for Navacerrada and follow the winding road up the foothills of the Sierra, through Punto Navacerrada and its ski slopes and follow the signs pointing toward Segovia, which is roughly 20 km (12 miles) farther.

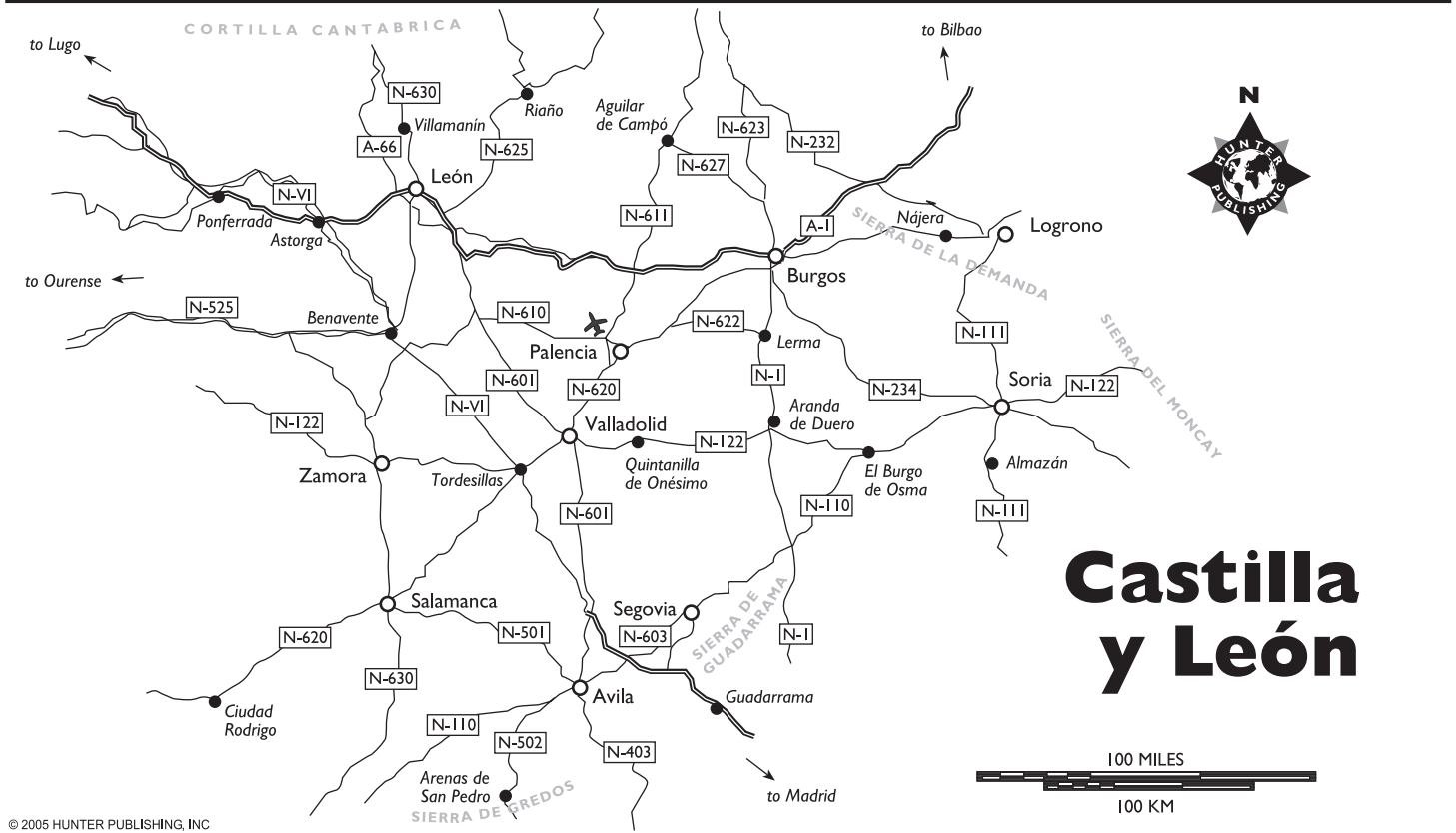
■ Sightseeing

The **Roman Aqueduct**, left, that is Segovia's calling card was built in the first century AD to supply water to the town when it served as a Roman military outpost. A set of steps to the right of the tourist office leads up to a *mirador* that allows a level view with the top of the aqueduct's water trough (from the busy plaza below it reaches its highest point of 29 m/95 feet) as it trails off in the direction of the Guadarrama Mountains – forming a nice backdrop. To accommodate the steep grade, the aqueduct required two sets of arches, one on top of the next. All told, it stretches for 15 km (nine miles), bringing water from the Río Frío for much of its course via underground channels. That it has survived relatively intact with only a few minor reparations in the 15th and 19th centuries is a testament to the architects. They used no mortar in its construction but relied on the keystones of each arch to exert the pressure that would hold the entire aqueduct together.

Sights En Route to the Catedral

Calle Cervantes leads up a grade to the left of the tourist office in Plaza de Azoguejo. In the evenings this street is crowded with locals window shopping, buying baguettes and taking their leisurely stroll. On your right, as you turn the corner onto the continuation **Calle Juan Bravo**, is the interesting **Casa de los Picos** *(House of Points, ☎ 92 146 26 74, open noon-2 pm and 7-9 pm during exhibitions)*. The granite façade of this 15th-century mansion is, as the name would imply, covered with hundreds of pointed pyramids. They serve no other purpose than to beg the question, why? It is now home to Segovia's school of applied arts. Check as you're passing by to see if there are any interesting exhibits underway.

A short way up you'll pass a set of steps on the left leading down to the **Alhónidga** (Corn Exchange), a late Gothic mercantile building dating to the 15th century that was formerly the town's granary. Continuing on Calle Juan Bravo, you'll reach the small Plaza Medina del Campo. Facing the statue of Juan Bravo, a leading figure in the Comuneros Revolt against Carlos V, you'll notice the Romanesque **Iglesia de San Martín** with its impressive Mudéjar tower. Next to it is the **Torreón de los Lozoya** *(☎ 92 146 24 61, open Mon.-Fri. 5-9 pm, Sat. and Sun. noon-2 pm and 5-9 pm)*, a large defensive



Castilla y León

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tower built in the 13th century that now houses various exhibitions. The steps between the two monuments lead to the **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo** *(☎ 92 146 20 10, open Tues.-Fri. 11 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, Sat. 11 am-7 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; entry 2.40€, students 1.20€; free on Thurs.).* This 15th-century house has been converted to host revolving exhibitions of contemporary art. The permanent exhibit features the work of Segovia's Esteban Vicente.

The Mudéjar style typifies the work of Moorish craftsmen who remained in Spain during and after the Christian Reconquest.

One block up, Calle Juan Bravo forks right from the narrow alley Judería Vieja. On the left is the **Convento del Corpus Christi** (currently closed for renovations), converted from a synagogue in the early 14th century. A painting inside depicts the event. As you enter the Plaza Mayor, but before your attention is completely diverted by the hulking, pointed mass of the Cathedral, take note of the small church on your right. The **Iglesia de San Miguel** originally occupied the center of the square but, after its partial collapse in the 16th century, was resurrected and moved to its current location. Isabel la Católica, the future instigator of the Inquisition and conqueror of the Moors, was crowned queen in the church.

The **Catedral**, shown at left *(☎ 92 146 22 05, open strange hours, but generally 9 am-5:30 pm),* was begun in 1525 under the direction of Juan Gil de Hontañón but not consecrated until 1768. It is a marvelous exhibition of Gothic overkill and the last of its style to be constructed in Spain. Among the numerous pinnacles is a Renaissance dome, the apse supported by buttresses and the church bell tower. This cathedral was erected after the previous one had been destroyed by fire during the Revolt of the Comuneros in 1520. Parts of the façade, a Gothic cloister by Juan Guas and some choir stalls were salvaged from the original. Chapel after chapel surrounds the impressive Baroque high altar piece, the work of Sabatini in the 16th century. Still, the view from the outside is what impresses. The **Museo de la Catedral** houses sculptures and metallic trinkets with religious significance, as well as a collection of 16th-century Spanish and Flemish paintings.

In the Direction of the Alcázar

Facing the Cathedral from the Plaza Mayor, follow **Calle Marqués del Arco** to the right. Passing all the junk tourist shops, make the next right on the wide Calle Desamparados to reach the **Casa Museo de Antonio Machado** *(☎ 92 146 03 77, open Wed.-Sun. 11 am-2 pm and 4:30-7:30 pm, entry 1.50€).* The famed Spanish poet and playwright and member of Spain's Generation of '98 stayed in this former boarding house off and on during the years 1919-1932. A staunch supporter of the Spanish Republic, he fled the country

in 1939 once Franco had come into power and he died soon thereafter. The small museum displays his personal effects and furniture from the period.

Continuing down Calle Marqués del Arco, the stores become more interesting with handmade furniture, luminous decorations and leather handicrafts, until you reach the gardens of the **Plaza de la Merced**. The Mudéjar tower rising at the far end of the plaza with its slate spire belongs to the **Iglesia de San Andrés**. One of Segovia's oldest surviving Romanesque churches, it dates to the 12th century. In approaching the Alcázar, the street becomes Calle de Daoiz as it passes through the **Canonjías quarter**. This attractive stretch is so-named for the many church canons that once inhabited the area, then cordoned from the rest of the city by an expansive wall.

Alcázar

Then comes the **Alcázar** *(☎ 92 146 07 59, open Oct.-March, 10 am-6 pm, Apr.-Sept. 10 am-7 pm, entry 3.10€, students 1€)*. This is the most fanciful fortress to be found in Spain, though far from the most authentic. The original fortress was likely constructed in the 11th century and later restored by Felipe II. In the 15th century the Trastámara Dynasty made Segovia the seat of the royal court and the Alcázar its royal residence. Through the years it was the sight of Castilian parliamentary sessions, temporary home of Isabel la Católica, a wedding chapel for Felipe II and location of the Spanish Artillery Academy, initiated by King Carlos III in 1764. Then, in 1862, it burned to the ground. The fairytale castle before you, on the edge of a cliff overlooking the convergence of the rivers Erasma and Clamores, with its perfect turrets and slate roofs and towers was rebuilt in the late 19th century.

Cross the false drawbridge over a dry moat and look around for the fire-breathing dragon that never was, perhaps expecting to see Goldilocks. As with the exterior, the interior halls are of various styles, Romanesque, Gothic, Mudéjar and Renaissance. Each has a different theme, from the throne room to the military room with suits of armor to the strange room with the inverted ceiling spires. For a toll of 4€ you can climb 80 m (260 feet) up to the top of the Torre de Juan II and look out over the city.

Churches with a View

Leaving the Plaza de la Reina Victoria Eugenia in front of the Alcázar you can follow a downhill trail outside the city walls to the **Iglesia de la Vera Cruz** *(☎ 92 143 14 75, open winter, 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-6 pm, summers, 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-7 pm, entry 1.50€)*. It's a 15-minute walk, but well worth it for the views across the river Eresma of the Alcázar and the walled city. The Knights of Templar founded the church in the 13th century. The unique polygonal floor plan with its large tower rising above was modeled after Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre. The chapel of the Lignum Crucias houses what is said to be a part of Christ's cross.

Nearby is the **Convento de Carmelitas Descalzas**, founded by St. John of the Cross (San Juan de la Cruz). The saint's remains were transferred to the mausoleum here from a chapel in Ubeda (Andalucía). You can continue up the Carretera de Zamarramala for even higher views, or return and follow the *ruta turistica panorama* that wraps around the base of Segovia's crowded crag.

BAR STREET

Segovia and nightlife go together about as well as fertilizer and gasoline. Things do heat up, however, on the aptly named El Calle de Los Barres just off the Plaza Mayor.

■ Where to Stay

☆☆☆ The **Hotel Infanta Isabel** *(Plaza Mayor 12, ☎ 92 146 13 00, fax 92 146 22 17, www.hotelinfantaisabel.com, hinfanta@telelines.es, d 70-88€)* is conveniently situated on the Plaza Mayor. The 19th-century building has a nice ground floor arcade and a small restaurant squeezed beneath the closely huddled rooms. It's an old building made to feel as new as possible, but don't expect airiness, a pool or a health spa. No room for that. The exterior rooms have balconies with tight views of the Cathedral (even more spectacular at night). All are classically styled with full bath, heating and television.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Hotel Partner Ayala Berganza *(C/ Carretas 5, ☎ 92 146 04 48, hosteriaayaber@futurnet.es, d 95-120€)* takes its name from the family that built this palace in the 15th century. As far as Castilian décor goes, this is a stylish place to stay, with dark wood and accents galore, bright and colorful bathrooms – a crisp, comfortable new/old appeal. You may feel like part of the old family, but there aren't many rooms to go around (13), so book ahead.

Hostal Plaza *(C/ Cronista Lecea 11, ☎ 92 146 03 03, fax 92 146 01 39, www.hostal-plaza.com, d 30-40€)* is hard to describe because each room is different. Some are small and feel like a medieval torture chamber, others are bright and cheery with balconies that overlook the main vehicular street that enters the Plaza Mayor. Traffic is restricted in the plaza – so no need to worry about noise pollution. The majority of the rooms share a bath down the hall. It's a hike to the third floor. The hostel flier doubles as a handy little tourist map.

Hostal El Hidalgo *(C/ José Canalejas 5, ☎ 92 146 35 29, d 35€)* is preferable to the Hostal Plaza, but tends to book up in the high season. It's behind the church of San Martín in an 18th-century palace. Rooms don't look the part, but for a hostel they are decorated with classic panache and all have full baths.

Camping

Acueducto *(Ctra L-601, km 112, ☎ 92 142 50 00, campings@navegalia.com, www.mmteam.interbook.net/acueducto)* is a few kilometers south of Segovia on the N-601, direction Madrid-León. There are plenty of facilities on hand, including a restaurant, hot showers, a swimming pool, grocery store and, something even more handy, transportation to the city center via the municipal bus network. It's 3.51€ for adults, 3.51€ for a tent space or 11.79€ all together if you've arrived in a car.

■ What to Eat & Where

Segovia, and for that matter all of Castilla y León is the land of the wood-burning oven. From these vaulted brick ovens come such delectable dishes as roast lamb (*cordero lechal*) and suckling pig (only weeks old and the benchmark for all of old Castille). In the hands of an accomplished chef, both need be flavored with little more than a dash of salt. The suckling pig, known as *cochinillo asado*, usually feeds four people. Other typical dishes include *judiones a la Granja*, a broad bean stew, *caldereta*, a stewed lamb, and the simple *sopa castellana*, a soup of garlic, egg and bread. For dessert, try the *ponche Segoviano*. It's a finger-licking fabulous cake dipped in liquor, filled with custard and glazed with marzipan.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Properly presenting a suckling pig is a ritual dating to the times of Castilian King Enrique IV, who decreed that only nobility could perform pig-cutting ceremonies unless royal permission was granted. The ritual goes something like this: with an assistant reading the royal edict of Enrique IV, an anointed person (most likely the chef) quarters the pig with the edge of a dish and then shatters the plate on the floor to the applause of the diners.

A friend of mine once called and explained that he was heading to Segovia with his father who was over visiting from the United States. He needed to impress the man; this I knew because the man had been supporting my friend while he lived the willy-nilly Spanish lifestyle. I sent them to **Casa Duque, Maestra Asador** *($$$$, C/ Cervantes 12, ☎ 92 146 24 86)*, a longtime classic on the Segovian dining circuit. That night he called to tell me that he and his father agreed: they had just enjoyed one of the best meals of their lives. After gazpacho, which he reported was prepared at the table with a tray of fresh vegetables, they had started in on the main course, suckling pig and, recognizing his father's sheer pleasure after the first bite, my friend broke the news: he was broke and needed money to hike the Camino de Santiago. Two months later he called again, from Santiago de Compostela, with blistered feet and a book stamped by each monastery he'd stayed at during the four-week journey.

Cueva de San Esteban *($$, C/ Valdeláguila 15, ☎ 92 146 09 82)* is just off the Plaza Mayor. As is typical of Segovian restaurants, prices for *tapas* are higher here than elsewhere in Spain, but the selection at San Esteban is admirable. There is also an affordable menu of the day during lunch and a less affordable one at dinner (12€).

Jamonería Las Tres BBB *($, C/ Ochóa Ondateguí 18)* is a narrow wedge of a bar on a corner in the Plaza Mayor with tasty *empanadas*. Grab a *bocadillo* to go or have a seat and watch the *fútbol* game on the tube with the rest of the locals.

You'll notice the wooden, man-shaped specials sign for **Tasca La Posada** *(C/ Judería Vieja 19, ☎ 92 146 21 71)* in the Plaza del Corpus just off the Plaza Mayor. Follow the narrow, winding street to reach the place. The low ceilings and the antiquated décor give it a truly authentic feel. Past the bar is a little hall that enters the main dining room. Service is typically hit-or-miss; on the last occasion it was hit all the way up until the dessert, *ponche Segoviano* (part of a *menu del día* that consisted of *sopa castellana* followed by fresh grilled trout with a glass of Ribera de Duero). A la carte choices are more entertaining, but the daily menu is one of the cheapest in town at 10€.

Excursions from Segovia

The **Palacio de La Granja de San Ildefonso**, nine km (5.4 miles) south of Segovia at the foot of the Sierra de Guadarrama Mountains, is immense and immaculate and a shade more appealing than Spain's other royal summer retreats. That is to say, it is feminine where El Escorial west of Madrid is pure testosterone. Construction on the palace was begun in 1721 by order of King Felipe V, the first of the French Bourbons to rule in Spain. It is no secret that he found Felipe II's summer retreat in San Lorenzo downright despicable and preferred his homeland to that of Spain. So he built the palace and modeled it after Versailles, stomping grounds of his father King Louis XIV. It emerged as an attractive blend of Spanish Baroque and French Neoclassical styles, surrounded by the most exceptional royal gardens to be enjoyed in Spain (the design of a Frenchman, no doubt). The interior – that which is accessible – is one vast display of ornate furniture and antiques from the period, along with a sizable collection of 17th-century Flemish paintings. A museum displays elaborate Flemish tapestries, and lots of them.

The palace was badly damaged by fire in 1918, but you wouldn't know it today and the gardens... well, they're the highlight. Trails lead to trails to trails to trails, all banked by immaculately trimmed hedges, colorful flower beds, pools and fountains (there are 26 of the latter). In the springtime, each Wed., Sat. and Sun. at 5:30 pm, the fountains come to life in a fabulous display of light and water.

(Plaza de España 17, ☎ 92 147 00 19, open April-Sept., Tues.-Sat. 10 am-6 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm, Oct.-Mar., Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3-5 pm; entry 4.81€, students 2.40€; the mandatory guided tour in Spanish lasts 45 minutes.) Up to 10 buses per day run between Segovia and La Granja.

■ Sepúlveda

Adventures on Water

Sepúlveda, roughly 60 km (37 miles) north of Segovia on the scenic N-603 that winds through mountains and flat meadows, is a jewel of a town strewn in terraced levels along an immense, golden-colored gorge. You'll run across few tourists in this wonderful little medieval enclave, and the locals may well cast a curious eye your way. The town is simply a nice bonus trip before exploring the nearby natural park of the River Duratón Canyons. Find the town square and then spend some time wandering through the cobbled streets that rise and fall with the lay of the land. Check out the ruined castle. There are exceptional views of the River Duratón to be had throughout town, and trails that lead a few kilometers west to a muddy dirt parking lot that declines to the frothy river where rafters unload their gear.

The brown natural park signs will point you in the right direction but, before you head out, stop by the 11th-century Romanesque **Iglesia de El Salvador**. The ancient church houses the natural park headquarters, the **Centro de Interpretación del Parque Natural de las Hoces del Río Duratón** *(Iglesia de Santiago, ☎ 92 154 05 86, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-5 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm)*. Rafting or kayaking this river as it winds through canyons cut in a mostly flat, arid land makes for a unique adventure. Deep, calm pools alternate with narrow stretches of rapids, with views all along of cliffs and caves, little sandy-colored homes and ruined castles atop the rim. The park is a nature preserve for vultures, so keep your eyes peeled.

Most of the outfitters are located in the town of Sebúlcor, the next town over, 10 km (six miles) west of Sepúlveda on a well-marked road. **Hoces del Duratón** *(C/ Corta 3, ☎ 92 152 21 50, www.hocesduraton.com)* specializes in rafting, nothing more. The outfitter rents kayaks for a 3½-hour guided float down the river for 30€. **Naturaltur** *(C/ San Juan, ☎ 92 152 17 27, www.naturaltur.com)* is a multi-adventure company. They'll rent mountain bikes for a half-day at 12€ or do the river rafting thing for 36€ per trip (which takes a good five hours). A shorter kayaking trip can be had for 24€. A final option is **Situral Turismo Activo** *(C/ Camino Callejas, ☎ 92 150 81 35, www.situral.com)*, which makes guided hiking (15€), mountain biking (30€) and canoe (30€) trips through the natural park.

Adventures on Snow

In the Valle de Riaza northeast of Segovia, **La Pinilla** *(☎ 92 112 55 00, www.lapinilla-vallederiaza.com)* is a small ski resort with average snow in a good year (in a bad year, snowmaking equipment can cover up to 90% of the slopes). A total of 21 runs include 12 reds (above average), five blues (average) and four greens (you get the pattern). Unfortunately, there are no challenging blacks and only a few poorly maintained bump sets. Most of the runs are on a treeless bowl (highest point is

2,257 m/7,400 feet) above a pine slope with two red runs cut through it beneath the main gondola lift. There are two quad lifts and one double, but for the most part the bowl runs rely on poma-lifts. The *temporada alta*, or busy season, occurs on holidays, weekends and those months when Spain is most crowded with tourists. At these times, ticket prices for many establishments, including ski resorts and hotels, are generally higher. A one-day lift ticket in the busy season costs 24€ and a half-day 16€. All other days a full lift ticket is 16€ and a half-day 10€. A couple of shops at the base of the mountain rent skis. Yesterday's skis, boots and poles are 14€ per day. The ski school, **Escuela Española de Esquí La Pinilla** can be reached at ☎ 92 112 50 75. An average season lasts from December to March.

To reach the resort, take the N-110 north from Segovia in the direction of Riaza and, when it connects with the N-1, continue north. The park is a 45-minute drive outside of Segovia, with turn-off signs to the right, in the direction of the mountains. You won't be able to miss it.

Adventures on Foot

If you've ever been suckered to the volcanic crater and ice caves (read cryogenic generator humming somewhere in the dark abyss) in eastern Arizona near its border with New Mexico, then the **Parque Arqueológico de Los Enebralejos** will come as no big, disappointing surprise. There once was a prehistoric settlement in this park outside the small town of Pradéna. There is again, a reproduction inside a pinewood fence that looks like a cluster of giant ant beds. In the exhibition center there are a few relics discovered on the site and some diagrams (in Spanish) describing the area. You access the caves via the exhibition center.

Spain has many expansive and truly beautiful caves, some of which are adorned with prehistoric art. This is not one of them. Among the stalactites to indicate that the cave served as a burial ground 2,000 years before Christ, someone has thoughtfully placed a fake skeleton. It all takes a little too much imagination. Save it for the kids.

(Cueva de los Enebralejos, ☎ 92 150 71 13, open summers Tues.-Fri. 11 am-2 pm and 4:30-8 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm and 4-9 pm; winters Tues.-Fri. 1-5 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm and 3:30-7:30 pm. Pradéna is 45 km/28 miles north of Segovia on the N-110.)

Where to Stay

In Sepúlveda the **Hostal Postigo** *(C/ Conde de Sepúlveda 22, ☎ 92 154 01 72)* offers small, homely rooms with terrific views of the surrounding mountains. There is a *meson* below and the proprietor organizes outdoor excursions. A double is 35€.

If you're out in the country, might as well stay in a true country place. **Puente del Duraton** *(Ctra Urueñas 1, ☎ 92 154 00 11, www.tursegovia.com/duration)* is a *casa rural* located just outside of the town. Rooms are pure rustic, with yellow walls and rough-hewn beams, twin beds and neat little windows with views of the surrounding landscape. A double is 40€, but always negotiable in the low season (it's usually low season around here).

Big spenders stay at the newly inaugurated ☆☆☆ **Hotel Vado del Duratón** *(C/ San Justo 8, ☎ 92 154 08 13)*. It's a modern, spacious three-star with a good restaurant downstairs. Doubles are 99€.

Camping

The nearest campsite is in Cantalejo, a few miles west of Sebúlcor and as many outside the park. **Camping Hoces del Duratón** *(Paraje las Vencia, ☎ 92 152 05 64)* has a grocery store and washing facilities and can capably accommodate a family of three or four. Adults 3.20€ per night; tents 2.50€; cars 2.40€.

Ávila

On a short outing from Madrid there are three favored destinations, San Lorenzo del Escorial, Toledo and, lastly, Ávila de los Caballeros. This lofty city is the highest provincial capital in Spain, crowning with its Herculean wall a rough landscape strewn with granite boulders. The Sierra de Gredos in the south of the province forms a scenic backdrop to Ávila and beautiful rolling land lies in between; in its foothills along rivers, small mountain villages have embraced rural travelers and offer facilities and instruction for hiking, climbing and fishing in the area. In the city, the remarkable condition of the walls, and the wealth of Renaissance palaces and Romanesque churches placed in and around them along a maze of cobblestone streets makes for a modern-day medieval crusade.

■ History

Ávila was fortified soon after the Moors were run out of the region in the 11th century. The city, long a frontier land between the two warring factions, would take no chances; there are 2,500 turrets spaced at regular intervals along the walls and even inside this seemingly impenetrable womb the homes and churches look like small fortresses, with few windows, high watchtowegrs and crenelations along rooflines.

The flourishing wool trade of the 13th century found Ávila as a central stopover on the sheepwalk from Béjar to Burgos. As a result, the city gained prominence and the wealthy class and Castilian royalty began to build grand residences within its walls. In recent times Ávila has sought to clean and restore its once ailing medieval façade and now, more than ever, proudly advertises its reputation as the city of Saints and Knights. In nearly every hotel there is a stolid suit of armor greeting tourists and, in making a round of the sights, the legacy of Santa Teresa is readily apparent. She was born in the city and, together with another local mystic, St. Juan de la Cruz, reformed the Carmelite Order, establishing convents here and throughout the country. The devout have since made regular pilgrimages to Ávila in honor of the Saint.

■ Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is located in the Plaza de la Catedral 4, ☎ 92 021 13 87. The Internet café **Cybernet** (Avda Madrid 25) is reached by following Calle Lopes Nuñéz out of the city walls to Calle de Humilladero and from there to Avenida de Madrid.

Elena Borchers is an English-speaking **tour guide** living in Ávila. She offers a two-hour tour of the Catedral, the 16th-century palaces, the Church of San Vicente, the city walls and the monuments pertaining to St. Theresa. Tours leave at 10:30, Mon.-Fri., from the west end of the Cathedral and at noon, Sat. and Sun. 75€ includes admission to all of the sites *(☎ 92 021 44 13)*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estacíon de Tren *(Avda de José Antonio 40, ☎ 92 025 02 02)* is well east of Ávila's old city, one block south of the Paseo de Don Carmelo. From 7:15 am-8:30 pm **trains** leave for Madrid (two hours) and Segovia (one hour) every hour. Other trains run to and from El Escorial (one hour; up to 10 per day) and Salamanca (two hours; five per day).

By Bus: The bus station *(Avda de Madrid 2, ☎ 92 922 01 54)* is a 10-minute walk east of the walls. From the Puerta de San Vicente follow Avenida de Portugal to its intersection with Avenida de Madrid. Buses run to and from Madrid's station on Calle Méndez Álvaro every hour from 7:15 am-8 pm. Four to five buses per day connect Salamanca (1 hour 45 minutes) and Segovia (one hour).

By Car: From Madrid by car, it's 45 minutes without traffic. Take the A-6, passing through the tunnel burrowed in the Sierra de Guadarrama. At Villacastín pick up the N-110. To Ávila the N-501 runs southeast from Salamanca, the N-110 runs southwest from Segovia and the N-403 runs north from Toledo.

■ A Sightseeing Stroll

In touring around Ávila, the city's famous **Medieval Walls** are rarely far from sight. The walls were likely constructed around the turn of the 12th century while the self-proclaimed "Emperor of all Spain," King Alfonso VI, was busily reconsolidating the Castilian regions from the Moors. The walls, actually one continuous expanse, wrap around the city for a length of 2½ km (1½ miles), with a total of nine gates, 88 watchtowers and well over 2,000 turrets. Standing beneath them, it's easy to understand why the Moors never made another attempt to reclaim the city. They are over 12 m (39 feet) high and originally would have had sentries walking the top perimeter day and night. Nowadays tourists can walk only along one portion near the Puerta del Alcázar. From this vantage point, the ancient city and the peaks of the Sierra de Gredos are picture-perfect. The entrance steps are next to the Cathedral, which is also part of the fortified wall. The Medieval Walls are open Tues.-Sun. 11 am-1:30 pm and 5-7:30 pm; closed afternoons during the winter.

For the best views of Ávila's walls, walk to the ***Mirador de los Cuatro Postes*** *(look-out point of the four columns). To reach it, leave the city through the western Puerta del Puente (the only side passed by the Adaja River). Cross the bridge over the river – taking note of the ancient Roman bridge next to it – and on the far side veer right at the fork in the road and look to the right for the signs to the mirador.*

La Plaza de la Catedral

Figure from the Catedral doorway

The Romanesque church-fortress is the main attraction of the plaza. The **Catedral** was begun in the 12th century as a part of the city's walls that were taking shape during the same period. Its apse, known to parishioners as the *cimorro*, is part and parcel of the defensive structure and the most ornate at that. The main façade is relatively modest in styling, save for the large Gothic window and the tower rising over it. The interior, on the other hand, is more elaborate than a fortress structure might portend; it conforms to the traditional shape of a Latin cross, lit by the sunlight cast through stained glass, with a fancily painted high altarpiece, carved choir stalls and nine chapels. The Capilla de Nuestra Señora de Gràcia includes an alabaster tomb that is well worth a look as it is delicately carved in the plateresque style (*plata*, in Spanish, means silver, a reference to the style's similarity to silver filigree). It bears the remains of Ávila's beloved bishop Don Alonso de Madrigal, whose nickname, El Tostado, was a loving nod to his swarthy skin tone. The Capilla del Cardenal houses the Museo Catedralico. Among the religious relics on display is a token painting by El Greco and a rather large silver processional monstrance. *(Plaza de la Catedral 4, ☎ 92 021 16 41, open 10 am-1 pm and 3:30-6 pm; entry 2.50€).*

On the corner across the street from the Catedral is the **Palacio de Velada**, a 16th-century residence that was once frequented by royalty, and, across from it, the Oficina de Turismo.

Plaza del Mercado Chico

From the Catedral, follow Calle de los Reyes de Católicos two blocks to reach the heart of the city center. The Plaza del Mercado Chico occupies the former space of a Roman forum, with the 19th-century *Ayuntamiento* (town hall) facing across the expanse to the Iglesia de San Juan Bautista. The font where St. Teresa was baptized is on display inside. *(Plazuela de San Juan, ☎ 92 021 11 27, open before and after mass.)* The story of St. Teresa continues at the Convento de Santa Teresa.

Around El Convento de Santa Teresa

Calle Dávila leads from the Plazuela de San Juan to the Plaza General Mola, over which the **Torreón de los Guzmanes** stands guard. Part of the offices of the Diputación Provincial (council of the province), the battlement tower

was constructed during the 16th century. Facing away from the tower, Calle Cepedas trails off to the left in the direction of the **Palacio de Dávila**, one of Ávila's most impressive privileged residences. The battlements indicate its dual purpose as a fortress. There are actually four houses within the complex, each with a unique design and the oldest dating to the 13th century *(Plazuela de Pedro Dávila 7, open Thurs. 4-6 pm).*

During the 16th century Ávila enjoyed its greatest period of splendor as a result of its strong role in the region's wool industry. As many as a hundred of these elegant palace-fortresses then crowded the walled city, which at the time was referred to as *Ávila de los Nobles*. Years of neglect and construction have tarnished these once fanciful domains or altogether erased them. If it interests, there is another nice grouping of palaces with Renaissance embellishment and defensive ramparts located along the north wall, including the **Palacio de Benavites**, now a tourist *parador*, and along Calle Lopez Núñez the **Palacio de los Águila** and the **Casa del Verdugo**.

Returning to the Plaza General Mola, take Calle Soledad around to the entrance of the **Convento de Santa Teresa** in the Plaza de la Santa (for the claustrophobic, the Puerta de la Santa allows escape from the fortified city). The Baroque convent was founded in 1636 over the site of the Cepeda mansion where the future reformer of the Carmelite Order, St. Teresa, was born in 1515. The interior garden was once the saintly child's playground while the elaborate Capilla de Santa Teresa was built in place of her bedroom; it is laden with gold and features a statue of the saint by Gregorio Fernández, a number of whose other works adorn the convent. Next door is the **Sala de Reliquias**, basically a trinket shop with a small exhibit of various strange commodities pertaining to the saint, the highlight of which is no doubt her ring finger.

Around the corner from the convent entrance, the **Museo de Santa Teresa** continues in the same vain, with portraits, copies of her writings, a recreation of her stark living quarters and odds and ends of the Carmelite Order. *(The convent is open 8:30 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-8:30 pm; the museum is open summers 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm; entry for both is 2€; the Sala de Religuias is open with free admission 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-7 pm.)*

Outside the Walls

The inner confines of Ávila's walls could only hold so much. Make a trek outside of them to visit a few of the city's other sights. **El Convento de San José** *(☎ 92 022 21 27, 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7 pm, entry 1€)* is located on Calle Duque de Alba, a five-minute walk outside the city walls. Pass through the Puerta del Alcázar to the right of the Cathedral and then the Plaza del Grande to reach this street. This convent was the first of what would be many convents founded throughout Spain by Santa Teresa. It was consecrated in 1562. The devout ascetic took a leading role in the convent's construction and its two plain churches look it. A small museum is dedicated to her saintly ways.

El Monasterio de La Encarnación *(☎ 92 021 12 12, open Mon.-Fri. 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 3-6 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm, entry 1.20€)* was established in the 16th century and would be Santa Teresa's residence for 29 years. During her later years in the convent, she spent her time implementing the reform of the Carmelite Order alongside St. Juan de la

Cruz. Her convent cell is on display and a museum houses other odds and ends pertaining to her life.

El Monasterio de Santo Tomás *(☎ 92 022 04 00, open 10 am-12:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, entry 1€)* is said to have been constructed under the watchful eye of Torquemada, feared inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Perhaps the place was cursed from the get-go. The Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, commissioned the monastery with the intention of making it an official residence. Then the Catholic Monarch's only son, Prince Juan, died at the tender age of 19 and foiled their plans. The Prince is interred in an elaborate tomb sculpted by Domenico Fancelli and set in the very center of the transept beneath the dome for all to see.

■ Where to Stay

Palacio Valderrábanos *(Plaza de la Catedral 9, ☎ 92 021 10 23, fax 92 025 16 91, administacion@palaciovalderrabanos.com, d 105€)* is a 14th-century palace cum hotel opposite the Cathedral in the center of the Plaza de la Catedral. The public spaces are wide open and inviting with a smattering of traditional décor, while the double rooms may seem a touch small to a price-point shopper. There is a noticeable lack of windows throughout the hotel, the result of its dual design – like many palaces in Ávila – as a fortress (note the guard tower). The wallpapered rooms are adequately furnished and fully carpeted. To this add a bar, banquet rooms and a comfortable dining area.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

The **Parador de Ávila** *(C/ Marqués de Canales de Chozas 2, ☎ 92 021 13 40, fax 92 022 61 66, avila@parador.es, d 93€)* occupies the 16th-century Renaissance Palacio de Piedras Albas, just inside the city walls on the north side of the historical quarter, a five-minute walk from Plaza de la Catedral. The Parador is named for Raimundo de Borgoña, 12th-century archbishop and noted reformer of the Spanish Christian Church. He was a leading patron of the Toledan School of translators, credited with interpreting ancient Arabic and Hebrew texts that would bridge the gap between the three cultures then sharing Spain. The son-in-law of King Alfonso VI, he was sent to Ávila after the conquest of Toledo and charged with repopulating and fortifying the city with a great wall. The rooms of the Parador are fully modernized and excellently appointed; some have views of the gardens while others overlook the plaza – neither is a bad choice. The parador restaurant specializes in the traditional cuisine of Ávila.

For the price and the attention to detail, there is no better place to stay in Ávila than the **Hostería de Bracamonte** *(C/ Bracamonte 6, ☎ 92 025 12 80, fax 92 025 38 38, d 60€)*. The main saloon evokes an authentic feeling of the Middle Ages, with rustic stone masonry, rough-hewn ceiling beams and electric torches casting a warm, inviting light. Throughout the lobby and the chambered rooms of the restaurant the staff scurries around with a smile, dressed in traditional black vests or red wool skirts. The country Castilian ambiance continues in the rooms, each a blend of rock, wood and plaster and subtly modernized. The Hostería, along with its excellent restaurant special-

izing in Castilian roasts, has long been a host to noteworthy Spanish bullfighters and artists.

Pension Continental *(Plaza de la Catedral 6, ☎ 92 021 15 02, fax 92 021 15 63)* is a neglected holdover from a bygone era. This expansive pension, with a once-elegant winding staircase that has begun to cant precariously toward the center, was certainly a mansion in an earlier life. Now the carpet is beginning to sprout roots, the ceilings are dingy with years of cigarette smoke and the plumbing makes sounds like a derailed freight train. But it has a prime location just across from the Catedral. A double with bath is 33€; without bath, 25€.

■ What to Eat & Where

In addition to the following restaurants, consider dining in the hotel restaurants in Ávila's **Parador** and the **Hostería de Bracamonte**. Both specialize in traditional Castilian fare, are renowned for their impeccable service and have a terrific old-world ambiance to boot. Prices at these restaurants run about 15€-25€ per diner.

The recipe for Yemas de Santa Teresa, a sweet, gooey egg yolk candy served throughout Ávila, is said to have been created by the saint herself.

Bar-Restaurante El Ruedo *($$, C/ Enrique Larreta 5, ☎ 92 021 31 98)* serves home cooking in a bright and cheery contemporary setting, characterized by its *ambiante taurino* or bullfighting décor. The afternoon *menu del día* is more than enough for one person and reasonably priced at around 12€. Not surprisingly in this land of brick ovens, the main dishes are roast lamb and pig atop a list that includes veal cutlets and T-bones.

Casa Guillermo *($$$, Plaza del Mercado Chico 3, ☎ 92 025 75 83)* is tucked in a shaded corner of the plaza Mercado Chico. This restaurant has a classy bent, with lights turned down low and a hush-hush tone. The house specialty *bacalao* (grilled cod, 16€) is the dish of choice. Next door, **El Portalón Cafe** $$, is a large and busy place with chipper, humorous service. In the afternoon, *tapas* of paella (3€) are served off a huge, steaming platter set atop the bar.

Mesón El Puente *($$, Barajada de la Losa 2, ☎ 92 022 50 51)* has a nice setting outside the city walls on the banks of the River Adaja. Sit at the outdoor terrace tables with views of the river and the city in the background. During the days the three-course *menu del día* is 11€. At night the prices spike a little, but are still a bargain for Castilian specialties such as roasts and grills, including trout from the nearby River Tormes and T-bones (*chuletón*).

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

The following restaurants come highly recommended by a native of Ávila and a part-time tour guide:

- **Cuatro Postes** *(Avda. Salamanca 23, ☎ 92 022 00 00).*
- **El Almacen** *($$$, Salamanca, Carretera 6, ☎ 92 025 44 55)* specializes in creative cuisine based on traditional Ávila recipes.
- **El Molino de la Losa** *($$$, Bajada de la Losa 12, ☎ 92 021 11 01).*
- **El Torreon** *(C/ El Tostado 1, ☎ 92 021 31 71)* is reputed for its lamb and suckling pig dishes.
- **Gran Prix Horno Santa Teresa** *(C/ San Nicolas 21, ☎ 92 021 38 11).*
- **Meson del Rastro** *($$, Rastro Plaza 1, ☎ 92 021 12 18)* serves roasts, veal and trout that jumped out of the river and onto the plate.

The Sierra de Gredos

The Cordillera Central Mountains cut east to west across the center of Spain like a spine, dividing its high and flat meseta into its northern and southern regions. If metaphor is the path to visualization, then this spine has three vertebrae, the Sierra de Gata to the west near Portugal, the Sierra de Guadarrama to the east in the Madrid province, and the central range known as the Sierra de Gredos south of Ávila. The Sierra de Gredos is less crowded than the Guadarrama and has better outdoor tourism facilities than Gata. From the River Tormes, fly fisherman catch the same trout you'll find throughout the restaurants of Ávila. From a peak near Piedrahít paragliders set sail to join the country's eagles – the Bonelli's, the Spanish imperial, the golden and the booted – all of which are modestly represented in the range. Hikers find trails that lead to a clear glacial lagoon and to the spindly peaks outside of Guisando where the mountain climbers look like ants. The fall of snow means cross-country skiers plying the valleys and with spring an array of butterflies colors the sky. In nearly every village of the Gredos it is possible to saddle up a horse and explore what lies in-between.

The Sierra de Gredos claims the highest peak of the Cordillera Central with the summit of **Almanzor** (2,592 m/8,500 feet) and more Spanish ibex than anywhere else in Spain. At the turn of the 20th century as few as 20 of these long-horned, goat-like climbers were said to exist. Fearing the inevitable, King Alfonso XIII established the protected Coto Real de Gredos in 1905. Needless hunting was curbed and the park has since expanded to include some 23,000 hectares (64,000 acres) of protected space and, at last count, over 5,000 ibex.

It is a decidedly two-faced range. On the northern face, the land rises gradually from a valley laced with clear streams to foothills with a smattering of pines and then lazily upwards to the peaks. It is possible to drive east to west across this expanse on the C-500 and take in the full breadth of the mountains to the south in passing from one village to the next. The southern face, in contrast, falls steeply away, with severe cliffs and peaks that seem to want nothing more than to get down to the Tiétar Valley as quickly as possible. The

geography on this face has fostered an almost Mediterranean landscape of vineyards, citrus trees and holm oaks.

The town of **Arenas de San Pedro** is the main hub for outdoor enthusiasts in the south while in the north a road leads to the area known as **La Plataforma** in the very heart of the natural park. From the Platform the park in all its diversity awaits with open trails.

■ The North Face

The N-403 south from Ávila is a lovely, scenic drive up, down and around a rolling, rocky terrain with long vistas of valleys and the mountains looming ever larger. After 25 km (15 miles), turn west onto the C-500 headed in the direction of Navaluenga; this road spans the north face as it passes through villages. First stop is **Navarredonda**, roughly 50 km (31 miles) down the road. Four km (2.4 miles) farther on, just before reaching the village of **Hoyos del Espino**, the turn-off on the AV-931 leads to **La Plataforma**, the base area for the Reserva Nacional de Gredos. To reach **Piedrahita**, continue past Hoyos on the C-500; after passing through **Navacepeda de Tormes**, look for the small sign on the right indicating the winding secondary road that leads to Piedrahita, a 30-minute drive to the north.

Adventures on Horseback

Horsemen seem to favor the small mountain villages of **Navarredonda de Gredos** and nearby **Barajas**. The two are situated on a rise north of the mountain ridge with a gentle sweep of foothills laid out before them, perfect terrain for a casual ride through pine and juniper forests that conceal a neat web of trails and shallow creeks. Save for the terrific surroundings, the villages are relatively unspectacular. There are plenty of restaurants and lodgings and make decent base camps. Most travelers prefer to continue to **El Barco de Ávila**, a larger and more architecturally stimulating town at the western end of the range, where the C-500 connects to the N-110.

The horseback guides of **Almanzor Turismo Equestre** *(Pajizos, s/n, ☎ 92 034 80 47)* are the picture of traditional Spain; they still wear wool cardigans and mauve berets and roll their own cigarettes at a gallop as mangy dogs snap at their horses' hooves. They make two regular excursions, a four-hour and an eight-hour, both of which depart from the Hostal Refugio de Gredos, three km (1.8 miles) west of Navarredonda in Barajas. The four-hour ride (35€) departs at 10:30 am and again at 4 pm for the valley of the River Tormes, leading through pinewoods and gorges past a waterfall that marks the emergence of the River Alberche and with numerous miradors along the way. The eight-hour journey (70€ with lunch) also leaves at 10:30 and includes the breathtaking ascent to the observation deck at the summit of La Mira, which allows one of the best panoramic views of the Gredos.

Turactiv *('La Fragua' de Barajas, 05635 Navarredonda de Gredos, ☎ 92 034 83 85, www.turactiv.com)*, located in a renovated 18th-century metal forge *(fragua),* is a multi-sport outfit in Barajas that arranges excursions for every outdoor activity imaginable: hiking, horseback riding, biking, cross-country skiing, climbing, kayaking, ascension, fishing, photography and paragliding.

Adventures from Trails to Water

The village of Hoyos del Espino is closest to the entrance of the **Reserva Nacional de Gredos**. East of the town the AV-9311 leads south to the parking and base area known as **La Plataforma** (1,750 m/5,740 feet). A number of trailheads merge at this spot and indicate the most popular hikes in the reserve. One of these leads to the **Laguna Grande**, a glacier-carved lake with vibrant blue water just below the peak of Almanzor. The hike takes three hours each way and is an easy one. Follow the well-marked path southwest; large granite slabs top the route as far as the Prado de las Pozas, a wide-open meadow a short way away. From there you'll pass the ruins of a former alpine refuge and another that is occasionally open called Reguero Llano. Heading west, you'll pass by the gorge of the River Pozas on a concrete path and, in roughly 45 minutes, reach the **Fuente de Los Cavadores** (a fountain on the left of the trail). From here the trail ascends to **Los Barrerones** (2,170 m/7,118 feet), a plateau that affords terrific views of the Almanzor Peak. In the ascent to the lagoon there is a natural lookout point to the right and, shortly, the trail picks up the old *Trocha Real*, a footpath built for Alfonso XIII, passing the ruins of the king's old mountain *refugio* and going through the Candeleda pass, where the lagoon makes its first appearance.

Refugio Elola, run by the Federación Española de Montañismo, offers beds near the lake. Serious hikers can continue on from here for the climb to the summit of **Almanzor**, the highest point in the range and ideal for vulture-watching (2,592 m/8,500 feet – another two-three hours) or head west to the **Cinco Lagunas**. For the latter route, most hikers prefer to begin in Navalperal de Tormes but if you've made it as far as the Laguna Grande, you can just as easily backtrack on the trail to reach this village and from there hitch a ride to Hoyos del Espino.

> **TIP:** The route from Cinco Lagunas to Navalperal de Tormes can take up to five hours. Heading in this direction, though, the hike is considerably easier than making it in the opposite direction.

Adventures in the Air

North of the N-500, the town of **Piedrahita** serves as a base-camp for paragliders that launch off the nearby **Puerta de la Peña Negra** (1,909 m/6,260 feet). The town itself has a few interesting sites, including a Neoclassical palace built for the Dukes of Alba and modeled on the palace of Versailles (it's now a public school and the gardens aren't as splendid as they once might have been) and a cheery, arcaded plaza mayor. The main source for information and flights in town is the **Centro de Vuelo Piedrahita** *(C/ Somoza 20, ☎ 92 036 05 50, www.flypiedrahita.com, steveham@teleline.es).* This outfit is run by Steve Ham, a member of the British Paragliding team and holder of the long-distance flight record in England. Ham and his partner offer a short paragliding course and two-person flight (you and the professional) from the Puerta de la Peña Negra for 42€ per day. The center is closed from October to March. The **Oficina de Turismo** is located in the *Ayuntamiento* or City Hall in the Plaza Mayor *(☎ 92 036 00 01).*

Where to Stay

The Parador de Turismo *(Ctra Venta Rasquilla, km 43, ☎ 92 020 74 76)* east of Navarredonda was the first established in Spain and originally a hunting lodge of King Alfonso XIII. To sleep cheap, the **Alberque Juvenil de Navarredonda de Gredos** *(Ctra Venta Rasquilla, km 42.5, ☎ 92 034 80 05)* offers bunk beds in town. **Camping Navagredos** *(Ctra de Valdeascas s/n, ☎ 92 020 74 76)* has standard facilities – restaurant, market and showers – and charges 3.20€ per night.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

There are over 20 *Casas Rurales* in town. These are generally traditional country homes that private owners prefer to rent out for the day or week to one party. One of the more interesting ones is **Casillo del Cerro** *(C/ El Cerro, s/n, ☎ 90 242 41 41, with three double rooms in a rustic, sandstone house, July-Aug. 439€ per week, 79€ per day; rest of the year 358€ per week, 66€ per day)*. Another is **La Pontezuela Arriba** *(C/ La Cruz 21, ☎ 90 242 41 41, July-Aug. 360€ per week, 66€ per day; rest of the year 300€ per week, 55€ per day)*.

Hostal Almanzor *(Ctra de Barco, km 41, ☎ 92 034 80 10, fax 92 034 81 14)* is a great one. Public and private areas have a country flare and the windows and outdoor terrace have happy views of the mountains. All of the rooms have en suite heating, television, telephone and full bath. It's a few kilometers east from Navarredonda on the C-500.

In Hoyos

CampinGredos *(Ctra Plataforma, km 1.8, ☎ 92 02075 85)* is outside of town near the River Tormes with plots laid out beneath pine trees. The campground has a small restaurant and cleaning facilities. The reception desk has useful information for nearby hiking and fishing excursions. Prices are 2.60€ per night.

La Galana *(Ctra de la Plataforma, km .2, ☎ 92 034 91 79)* is a rural tourism center. It has a restaurant, two nearby *casitas* for rent capable of holding four-five people, and sells hefty mountain clothes and rents outdoor sporting goods, including mountain bikes, cross-country skis and climbing gear. It's on the road between Hoyos del Espino and La Galana.

Meson Galayos *(Ctra del Barco de Ávila, s/n, ☎ 92 034 90 14)* is a bed and breakfast that rents double rooms with full bath, television and breakfast for 30-35€ per day.

■ The South Face

From Ávila, the N-502 runs all the way to the main villages of the south face. The road passes through the Puerto de Menga in the Sierra de la Paramera y Serrota and then the Puerto del Pico, with great views of the mountains and the ancient Roman road that is still occasionally used by shepherds. After this second pass, turn southwest on the AV-903 to reach destination numero uno, Arenas de San Pedro.

Sightseeing

Arenas de San Pedro is the largest town on the southern face of the Sierra de Gredos and tends to be thronged with tourists and Spanish escapees beginning in the spring. The town is situated at the confluence of the rivers Cuevas and Arenal with the steep mountains all but cradling around it just to the north. A few sights are of note and can be taken in during an afternoon before heading west to the small villages at the very foot of the mountain that serve as gateways to the top. These include the **Castillo de Triste Condesa**, the 16th-century Gothic **Iglesia de Asunción** with the town's clock tower and the **Palacio del Príncipe Luis de Borbón**.

Outside of town, the 16th-century **Monasterio de San Pedro de Alcántar** *(☎ 92 037 02 04, open 9:30 am-noon and 4-6:40pm)* shelters the bones of its namesake and patron saint of Extremadura and has a museum with various gold liturgical relics. To go underground, the **Cuevas de Águila** *(☎ 92 037 71 07, open 10:30 am-1 pm and 3-7 pm)* are a 20-minute walk from town in Ramacastañas, replete with gloomy natural caverns teethed by stalactites and stalagmites.

If the main **Oficina de Turismo** is closed *(Plaza de San Pedro, s/n, ☎ 92 037 23 68),* stop in to the *Ayuntamiento* (City Hall) in Plaza del Generalísimo 1 for tourist information. La Sepulvedana buses run once per day from Ávila to Arenas' **Estación de Autobuses** (☎ 92 037 00 93) and Doaldi buses from Madrid arrive and depart three-four times daily.

Adventures on Foot

West of Arenas, three simple mountain villages are strung together at the foot of the sierras: **Guisando**, **El Arenal** and **El Hornillo**. Climbers prefer Guisando for the hiking trails that lead to the base of a number of popular bolted climbing routes. From town the path is marked in ascent to La Apretura at the foot of **La Mira peak** (2,348 m/7,700 feet), where the Refugio Victory serves as a base-camp for climbers. From here, a grouping of granite spindles rising upwards of 2,000 m (6,600 feet) can be attacked (the most difficult, best left to the most experienced, is Torreón). Hikers can continue on from the *refugio* to the summit of La Mira, which many believe offers the most impressive views in the Sierra de Gredos. The trail passes a waterfall marking the birth of the River Pelayos and is capped at the top by an old telegraph tower.

The crew at the mountain refuge of La Apretura knows all there is to know about the nearby climbs, but to learn more in advance of a trip here, contact the **Federación Castellano-Leonesa de Montañismo**, based in Valladolid *(☎ 98 322 64 00).*

Where to Stay

Camping Prados Abiertos *(Ctra N-502, km 72, ☎ 92 038 60 61, derivera@telepolis.com)* is six km (3.7 miles) outside of Arenas in the direction of Mombeltrán. The campsite has bungalows and above-average amenities. The parcel package costs 10.10€ and includes space for a car, tent and one person. Additional campers are charged 2€ apiece.

The **Hostería Los Galayos** *(C/ Condestable Dávalos 4, ☎ 92 037 13 79, fax 92 037 22 96)* is a fine place to stay in town, offering rooms with views of the Triste Condesa castle and the mountains and a restaurant. Doubles are 43€.

Sleeping options in Guisando include **Camping Los Galayos** *(Ctra Linarejos, s/n, ☎ 92 037 40 21)* and a number of traditional huts rented out by the town's *Ayuntamiento* or town hall *(☎ 92 037 40 01)*.

Salamanca

The landscape of Salamanca's province is often dismissed as a monotonous tableland, dry, dusty and difficult for all but the hardiest farmers to eke a living from. The flat, patchwork plains of the center, north and west of the province do predominate, delineated only by the variously colored harvests and the old slate walls that have been tediously heaped by farmers through the years. The extreme south of the province, in contrast, rises abruptly with the western extension of Spain's central mountain range, while the western border with Portugal is defined by an impressive series of gorges through which the lazy Río Duero runs its course.

In the fierce Castilian sunshine the city of Salamanca radiates the color of gold as it rises abruptly above the plains along the north bank of the Río Tormes. As you approach, when it is still miles off, views of the Casco Antiguo, or historical quarter, are unimpeded and it is no doubt one of Spain's most monumental assemblages. The paired cathedrals stand tall and broad above an escarpment of barrel-tiled roofs; moving closer, the 2,000-year-old Roman Bridge appears, marking the ancient silver route that once connected southern Spain to the north. The Moors controlled the city for nearly four centuries, but few lingering traces survive as evidence of their occupation. The Christians are responsible for Salamanca's splendid monumentality. Once they had routed the Moors in 1085 under Alfonso VI, they quickly set to the task of building their cathedral and protecting it with a new defensive wall. In the 13th century one of the world's first universities was established in Salamanca, ushering in a long period of prosperity. Wide and attractive medieval streets were bordered with palaces and monasteries, typically shaped by the unique stone quarried in nearby Villamayor and carved in the intricate Salamancan plateresque style (*plata*, in Spanish, means silver, a reference to the style's similarity to silver filigree). Salamanca, with just over 160,000 inhabitants at last count, continues to enjoy its reputation as an exuberant university town. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its heralded Plaza Mayor, the social nexus of the city. From it, gates lead in every direction through the medieval city and you'll immediately notice and appreciate how clean and ordered it all is.

■ Tourist Information

The **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** *(☎ 92 321 83 42)* is located in Plaza Mayor 14. Another tourist office, this one dedicated to the province of Salamanca, is in the Casa de las Canchas *(Rúa Mayor, ☎ 92 326 85 71)*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The train station *(☎ 92 312 02 02)* is on Paseo de la Estación. To reach it, take the Gran Vía north, in the direction away from the river, and at the Plaza de España pick up the Paseo de la Estación. Up to four trains per day run to Ávila (1½ hours) and Madrid (2½ hours). One train per day departs for Lisbon.

By Bus: The Estación de Autobuses *(☎ 92 323 67 17)* is between Avenida de Champagnat and Avenida de Filiberto Villalobos. Head west from the Plaza Mayor on Calle Prior (if you're facing the tourism office, it's the gate to the left) and continue for four crooked blocks until reaching Paseo de Carmelitas. Make a left and, at Avenida de Filiberto Villalobos, make a right. The bus station is five minutes down on the left. **Segovia** (2½ hours) two per day; **Madrid** (three hours) up to 15 per day; Ávila (1½ hours) up to four per day; **León** (2¼ hours) three on weekdays, one on weekends.

By Car: From Madrid by car, take the N-VI/A-6 northwest and turn off for Ávila on the N-110/A-51. From Ávila pick up the N-501 west. The N-630 runs from Salamanca to Cáceres in Extremadura. North on the N-630 leads to Zamora and eventually León.

■ Sightseeing

"Salamanca casts a spell on all who have enjoyed the peacefulness of life here, awakening in them a desire to return." Miguel de Cervantes, plaque in Plaza de Anaya

Plaza Mayor

Salamanca lays claim to the most attractive town square in all of Spain; only a Madrileño would dare opine *al contrario*. It is situated in the very center of the city's Casco Antiguo, making it a hub of activity at all hours. Roving bands of musicians play brass, guitars and accordions to sangria-sipping tourists seated at outdoor tables; half-wit performers fumble their latest tricks; amateur photographers struggle to capture the great Baroque square in one click of the shutter.

The Plaza Mayor was commissioned by Felipe V as a gift to the city in gratitude for the Salamantinos' support of the Bourbons during the Spanish War of Succession. From 1729 to 1755 Alberto Churriguera oversaw its construction – an uninterrupted ground-floor arcade with 88 arches defining the imperfectly square perimeter with a four-story façade highlighted by the city's *Ayuntamiento* (town hall). Granite accents set off the Villamayor stone quarried from the nearby town and are seen throughout the city, giving Salamanca that famous golden hue in sunlight. The stone, long favored by the locals for its malleability, is the key component of the Salamanca plateresque style. The *pabellónes* (pavilions) connected to the *Ayuntamiento* feature medallions with bas-reliefs depicting the Spanish monarchs from Alphonso IX to Carlos III, conquistadores Hernán Cortez, Pizarro and one Don Xptova Colón (otherwise known as Christopher Columbus), along with other illustrious figures, including El Cid and Santa Teresa.

Catedral Nueva

With the city growing and the Catedral Vieja threatening to collapse, the Catedral Nueva was begun in 1513. Not completed until the 18th century, the resulting cathedral was predominantly of Gothic styling with plateresque and Baroque touches. An early plan had included two towers, but the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 foiled that plan. The lone Baroque tower is modeled after the one atop Toledo's cathedral.

In the main chapel notice the choir stalls adorned with figures of saints and the pelican-shaped lectern. Among the smaller chapels, the Capilla Dorada (golden chapel) houses a Romanesque carving which El Cid is said to have taken with him during his exile by King Alfonso VI. The exile was the result of El Cid's having led an unauthorized military raid into Moorish-controlled Toledo in 1081.

Before entering the Catedral Viejo, look up for the astronaut. Yes, astronaut. The controversial space explorer was added by a group of humorous stonemasons hired to repair the jambs that had grown brittle over the course of 400 years. *(☎ 92 321 74 76, open daily, winter 9 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm; summer 9 am-2 pm and 4-8pm.)*

Catedral Vieja

The Old Cathedral is accessed through the new one. The construction of Salamanca's Catedral Vieja was begun in 1150, soon after the Christians had run the Moors out of the city, and completed in the 13th century. It originally conformed to the traditional cruciform ground plan, but once the Catedral Nueva was tacked onto it, it lost that shape. The Romanesque styling makes for an interesting contrast to the much larger Gothic cathedral adjoining it. The reredos of the main altar sports 53 panels painted by Nicholas of Florence in the 15th century narrating the life of Jesus. Over the altar is a wooden effigy with bronze head and hands of the Virgin of La Vega (fertile plain), Salamanca's patron saint.

The dome above the transept is well known by Salamantinos as the *Torre del Gallo* for the rooster that sits atop it. If you notice a young man or woman pacing nervously back and forth in the cathedral, pay no mind. Doctoral candidates from the University of Salamanca spend their nerve-wracking pre-examination night in the cathedral's St. Barbara Chapel. *(Catedral Vieja, ☎ 92 321 30 67; Museo Catedralico, ☎ 92 321 74 76, open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-1:30 pm; entry 3€, students 2.25€.)*

"How tranquil the life
of he who flees from mundane noise
and follows the hidden
path along which
the few sages of this world have traveled!"
Fray Luis de León

DOCTOR, DOCTOR, GIVE ME THE NEWS

It is a doctorate ritual to spend the nerve-wracking night before final examination in the chapel of Santa Barbara next to the Cathedral. The following day entails grueling hours of questioning, the responses to which will undoubtedly change the candidate's life. Rejected candidates leave sullenly by the Puerta de Carros. For the triumphant, there is a procession of musicians called the *tunas*. The graduate is led into the assembly hall to face the rector of the university and his or her master professor, who says in Latin, "with this ring wisdom is offered to you as a spouse forever; show yourself worthy of such a spouse." The graduate is shown a book that is open, then closed, indicating that wisdom should be passed on but guarded. Finally, the name of the new doctor is inscribed on the walls of the university in pig blood and olive oil.

La Universidad de Salamanca

Founded in the 13th century, Salamanca's university was soon recognized as one of the world's leading educational centers. Foreign rulers were known to defer to its faculty to settle disputes; those same professors foretold the wrath of inflation in Spain with the introduction of so much new wealth from the New World. Mathematical and scientific concepts were continually challenged and reinterpreted; and year after year illustrious students enrolled – Miguel de Unamuno, Fray Luis de León, St. Ignatius Loyola, Hernán Cortes, Lope de Vega and Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, to name a few.

Presided over by the statue of its beloved rector Fray Luis de León in the Plaza de las Escuelas, the Gothic university building you see today was constructed in the 15th century. Its beautiful façade, in the Salamanca plateresque style, was added in 1529. It is carved with three friezes (nearsighted folks will be pleased to realize that the arabesques increase in size as they ascend). The first, above the twin doors, depicts the Catholic monarchs embracing a single scepter, said to represent the unity of Spain; the inscription, engraved in Greek, reads: "The Monarchs for the University and the University for the Monarchs." The second frieze showcases Emperor Carlos V's coat of arms and the third frieze a pope, though no one knows exactly which pope.

Look around for the famous frog of Salamanca, senn at left. According to tradition it brings good luck to anyone who locates it. (Hint: look for the three skulls on the right side of the façade.)

The interior quadrangle accesses the original lecture halls. An ancient American sequoia grows in the center and a stone stairway carved with the tree of life leads to the classrooms, each named for one or another of the school's notable intellectuals. There is the room of Francisco de Vitoria, founder of international law; the room of the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno; and the most interesting, the room once presided over by Fray Luis de León, poet and professor of humanities. While in the midst of a lecture, León was arrested and imprisoned under the auspices of the Inquisition for teaching with a

Hebrew version of the bible. The room was not disturbed and hasn't been since. According to tradition, León was released several years later, whereupon he returned to his classroom and began his lecture with the line, "As we were saying yesterday...."

The university's vast library is also located in the quadrangle, though access is restricted to scholars in order to protect the 50,000 ancient volumes. Ironically, Spaniards charged with censoring potentially damaging texts during the Inquisition left many permanently defaced.

These days it is no longer the great honor and privilege that it once was for a Spaniard to declare, "I am from the University of Salamanca." At the turn of the 17th century the university had begun a steady decline, largely the result of changes initiated for the sake of politics – changes the faculty was loathe to prevent. Jews were kicked out of the university and refused admission in the future; those of noble birth were given precedence in admissions, to the exclusion of many great minds; mathematics was removed from the curriculum, and, soon thereafter, medicine. Where the University of Salamanca had enrolled as many as 7,800 students per calendar year during its intellectual heyday in the mid-16th century, enrollment bottomed out at 300 in 1824. Today the university has rebounded, though it may never regain its esteemed position among the world's most innovative universities. *(Patio de Las Escuelas 1, ☎ 92 329 44 00, ext. 1150, open Mon.-Sat., 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, Sun., 10 am-1:30 pm; entry including museum 2.40€, students 1.20€.)*

Convento de San Esteban

An immense arch greets visitors to the vast Dominican convent of St. Stephen. In the shadow of the arch an exceptionally ornamented plateresque façade bears saints and holy niches, a 17th-century representation by Juan Antonio Ceroni of the stoning of St. Stephen and, above it, a Calvary scene.

The stunning church-convent was designed by Juan de Álava and begun in 1524. Its crucifix shape maintains a single, wide nave. Above Churriguera's retable atop the high altar is another depiction of the Martyrdom of St. Stephen, this one painted by Claudio Coello. St. Stephen was anointed Pope from 254 to 257 and was killed during the persecution of Christians by Roman emperor Valerian, though scholars doubt that he was martyred.

The portico leads to El Claustro de los Reyes (Royal Cloister). The courtyard, with a double arcade that is a mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles, is ornamented with busts of prophets. In the Salon de Profundis, Christopher Columbus is said to have made one of his earliest appeals for a new western voyage during the winter of 1486. *(Plaza de Concilio de Trento, ☎ 92 321 50 00, open Tues.-Sun. winters, 9 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm, summers 9 am-1 pm and 4-8 pm; entry 1.20€.)*

Casa de las Conchas

It's amazing what a few shells can do for an otherwise boring exterior. Rodrigo Aría Maldonado, ambassador to the Catholic Monarchs and Knight of the Order of Santiago, built the House of the Shells in 1490. Apart from the paired Isabeline window and the Maldonado family's coat of arms, there are over 300 shells adorning the façade of this former mansion, each roughly eight inches in diameter (just you try and count them all). The scalloped shells – if you were won-

dering why in the world someone would think to do such a thing – are traditionally associated with the Apostle St. James. *(C/ Compañía 39, ☎ 92 326 93 17, open Mon.-Fri. 9 am-9 pm, Sat. and Sun. 9 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm.)*

Casa de las Muertes

With the most ominous plateresque façade to be found in Salamanca, it's little wonder this place is known as the House of the Dead. It was built for the archbishop Alonso de Fonseca in the 16th century, whose bust adorns its façade along with cherubs and lots of leering skulls (can skulls leer?). Never shy about attaching legends to accommodating subjects, Spaniards claim that a priest was once murdered inside. *(C/ Bordadores 6.)*

Casa-Museo de Unamuno

Adjoining the House of the Dead is the former home cum museum of Miguel de Unamuno, famed poet, novelist, professor of Greek and rector of the University of Salamanca. Unamuno spent his last years here, having been condemned to house arrest after publicly lambasting both the Republicans and Nationalists for escalating the Spanish Civil War. He died in 1936, the year war officially began. *(C/ Bordadores 4, ☎ 92 329 44 00, ext. 1196; open winters Tues.-Fri. 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-2 pm; summers Tues.-Fri. 9:30 am-1:30 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-1:30 pm; entry 1.80€ includes a mandatory tour that takes 20-30 minutes – most likely in Spanish.)*

Noteworthy Museums

Salamanca has more monuments than most tourists are interested in, or even physically capable of seeing in a few days' time. The following is a sampling:

- The **Museo Art Nouveau y Art Deco** is housed in the Casa de Miguel de Lis, a 19th-century *modernista* building and an abrupt departure from traditional Salamancan architecture. There is no underlying theme to this private collection, which includes everything from furniture to stained glass to porcelains and provocative sculptures. *(C/ Gibraltar 14, ☎ 92 321 14 25, entry 2.10€, students 1.50€.)*
- The **Puente Romano** (Roman Bridge) was erected over the River Tormes during the reign of Emperor Trajan. The 15 arches nearest the city are original; the rest were swept away during a massive flood in the 17th century and later replaced. Notice the statue of the Verraco Ibérico (Iberian Boar), an emblem of the city attributed to pre-Roman inhabitants and which most people mistake for a headless bull. The bridge formed part of the ancient Roman Camino de la Plata (silver route), a heavily traveled route spanning from Mérida to Astorga.
- The **Museo de Salamanca** is across the Patio de Las Escuelas from the university. The elegant 15th-century palace is similar in style to the nearby Casa de Las Conchas constructed during the same period. Queen Isabel la Catolica's personal physician, Fernando Alvarez Abarca, originally occupied it. Today it entertains revolving cultural exhibitions and houses a permanent collection of sculptures and paintings, including Luis de Morales'

Pieta, the Virgin Mary mourning over the death of Christ. *(Plaza de Las Escuelas 2, ☎ 92 321 22 35; open Tues.-Sat. 8 am-2 pm and 4:30-8 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm, entry 1.20€.)*

■ Nightlife

If you hadn't already noticed, Salamanca is a lively university town known for its festive late-night atmosphere. Here's where age may factor into the plans. There are three zones in the general vicinity of the Plaza Mayor, each with its own demographic ballyhoo.

- **Zona Varillas**, around the street of the same name running from the Mercado Central to Gran Vía, is like an anarchic daycare center with rowdy teenagers filtering into the streets and shot bars galore. Among the choices in this alcoholic Disneyland is the cheesy **Harley Bar**, replete with biker memorabilia and knock-off Harley-Davidson regalia that is just different enough from the real stuff to avoid a lawsuit. **Chupiteria Jack Daniels** is a crowded shot bar nearby. Drink enough watered-down shots and you can win a hat. The same goes for **La Distilieria Chupiteria**.
- **Zona Bretón** is across Gran Vía (which also has a number of bars and clubs) and two blocks down from Zona Varillas; along Calle San Justo to the Plaza de Bretón it's a mostly 20-something scene with a few class bars thrown in that attract an older set. One of those is **El Savor** *(C/ San Justo 28)*, a swank cocktail club with a new-age Aztec décor and live *musíca latina* at nights. They also do salsa lessons Mon.-Fri. from 8:15-10:15. **De Laval Genoves Submarino** *(C/ San Justo 27)* is designed to feel like you're partying in a submarine, with lots of steel piping, port holes, metal walls etc. If you're claustrophobic, swim somewhere else.
- The **Zona Viejo** (there really isn't a name for this area – just made it up) comprises the scene on and nearby Calle Espoz y Mina one block west of the Plaza Mayor. For the most part the area is frequented by ladies and gentlemen who think they're too old to go to the other two zones and keep on thinking that well past middle-age. **La Regenta** *(C/ Espoz y Mina)* is an authentic early 20th-century café with candlelit tables and a mostly local (and seemingly intellectual) crowd retrieving cocktails from silver platters. Down and across the street is the bar **Rojo y Negro** *(C/ Espoz y Mina)*. Frank Sinatra would have dug this place, yeeaah! Inside it's all black vinyl and red veneer with black and white photos of famous dead people. **Morgana** *(C/ de Iscar Peira)* is a late-night disco one street over with a scary iron welded dragon greeting visitors outside. The dancing (to popular tunes and occasionally some house music) doesn't start until late, when the two dungeon-like levels are packed with would-be trendsetters.

Apart from these zones, pubs and bars are scattered throughout Salamanca. **Café/Bar Meson Cervantes** occupies a second-floor room on a corner in Plaza Mayor. To find the place, listen for the loud music. It's usually crowded and prime for socializing with new friends. **The Irish Rover**, part of the

Irish bar chain that has branches in every major Spanish city, is at the end of Rúa Mayor just past the Casa de Las Conchas.

■ Where to Stay

The **Parador de Salamanca** *(C/ Teseo de la Feria 2, ☎ 92 319 20 82, fax 92 319 20 87, salamanca@parador.es, d 90-100€)* has as its selling point the views of Salamanca across the Río Tormes. From its hilltop perch, they are the best to be had in Spain. In the context of Spain's other appealing *paradores*, this one lacks history and style. It is vast and spacious and *was* in need of an interior refurbishment (the new look should be complete before the publication of this book). The private balconies and view make the stay worthwhile.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Palacio de Castellanos *(C/ San Pablo 58, ☎ 92 326 18 18, fax 92 326 18 19, www.nh-hoteles.es)* was built to emulate the 15th-century palace that once occupied its space. It relies on that reputation, and makes good on it with elegantly appointed rooms, plush, fluffy linens and fully modern full baths. Of the original palace, only the courtyard remains and it has been tastefully restored to give a period-sense of originality to the rest. From the rooms you can look across the Plaza del Concilio onto the Convento de San Esteban, one of Salamanca's most impressive plateresque monuments.

Hotel Emperatriz I *(C/ Compañía 44, ☎ 92 321 92 00, fax 92 321 92 01, www.emperatrizhotel.com, d 45-51€)*, as opposed to II and III, is in the very center of Salamanca's old city, a minute away from everybody's favorite landmark, the Casa de las Conchas, and two more from the Catedrales. The exterior façade may be a little misleading, for it looks like a prototypical medieval enclave, complete with plaster that has peeled away in places to reveal the quarried stone set in place hundreds of years ago around a heavy, rounded wood plank door. The interior isn't so cool; it's modern, but in a 1980s vein, and doesn't by any means push the decorative bounds of two-star hotels the world over. The reasonable price, central location and convenient garage car park compensate for the lack of old world charm many visitors expect in Salamanca.

Budget Beds

In the Plaza Mayor, **Pension Robles** *(Plaza Mayor 20, ☎ 92 326 54 61)* has a nicely refurbished hallway. They haven't quite gotten around to all of the rooms yet, but for the price (25€ per double) and, with private bathrooms, it's a gas. Don't expect views of the Plaza Mayor; the family has reserved those rooms for itself.

Across the way is the shanty known as **Pension Los Angeles** *(Plaza Mayor 10, ☎ 92 321 81 66, d with sink 18€, with toilet 30€)*. Its small, stained and smelly rooms are very basic. A few have small windows, but most are dark interior rooms. Opt for one with an in-room toilet if available. The upside is that the hostel is one floor above an Internet café, usually crowded with young, sociable travelers.

Calle Meléndez is an attractive street a few blocks down Calle San Pablo from the Plaza Mayor and it has a slew of hostels along with one Internet café. **Pension Lisboa 1** *(C/ Meléndez 1, ☎ 92 321 43 33)* is run by a very friendly young lady. Not much else to say except that the architect should be commended for developing such exceptionally thin walls. A double with toilet is 24€ or 18€ for a room with only a sink and mirror. As for the others, well, they aren't dirty, no cockroaches were spied, yet they still seem a little... how do you say... RUNDOWN! These are **Pension Las Vegas** *(C/ Meléndez 13, ☎ 92 321 87 49, d 18-21€)* and **Pension Barez** *(C/ Meléndez 19, ☎ 92 321 74 95, d 18€, with communal bathroom).*

■ What to Eat & Where

The signature of Castilla y León cooking, tender roast dishes are the highlight of many a Salamancan restaurant. Along with the *cabrito* (kid) and *cochinillo* (suckling pig), expect a surprising array of pork creations. *Cerdo* (pork) finds it way into just about everything, in seemingly infinite varieties. The *hornazo* is a particularly common pie, much like an *empanada*, baked with *chorizo* (spicy sausage), hardboiled egg, bacon, ham and pork. There is no shortage of restaurants and *tapas* bars in the **Plaza Mayor**, but these are expensive. The **Rua Mayor** and **Calle San Pablo** lead past some savory places, and just outside of the plaza around the **Mercado Central** are a number of exceptional local eateries. **Calle León Felipe** is a popular zone for *tapas*.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Restaurante El Candil *($$$, C/ Ventura Ruiz Aguilera 14-16, ☎ 92 321 72 39)* is a pleasure to dine in. This family-owned and -run restaurant has occupied the same red painted brick corner near the Mercado Central since 1940. The jolly owner, Mario Estevez Huerta, has since relinquished some of the responsibility for running the place to his two sons. Now he prefers to makes the rounds, greeting customers with a smile, suggesting dishes and questioning tastes. One can't help but like the guy and feel at home in his authentically Castilian restaurant. He'll want you to try the house's special *empanadas* with *salchíchon* sausage and *jamón*, and probably recommend the *cochinillo asado* (suckling pig) or *lechazo* (young lamb), which he'll point out in a glass case near the door. During the restaurant's annual *Jornadas Vinícolas* you can sample wines representing every region in Spain. El Candil's bar is loaded with *tapas* if a full meal isn't in the cards for the night.

Restaurante Río de la Plata *($$$$, Plaza del Peso 1, ☎ 92 321 90 05)* is an exceptional Salamancan restaurant and the tour groups have realized this. It is located a block south of the Plaza Mayor and Mercado Central. The waiters seemed a tad gruff, at least to one young man who didn't appear to carry a thick wallet and hadn't dressed properly for the occasion (I think he was from Texas). Pass the bar and head down into the nicely appointed dining room where excellently tailored waiters serve dishes of grilled boar (*tostón a la plancha*), *cabrito* and lamb chops to the white-clothed tables whose occu-

pants have chocolate figs and roasted apples to savor for desert. A fine establishment for one with a thick wallet.

El Bardo *($$$, C/ Compañía 8)* is next to the Casa de las Canchas. A young, lively crowd enjoys stews (*guisos*) and roasts (*asadas*). Vegetarians take note, there are a number of *platos sin carne* to choose from.

Inbis *($-$$, C/ San Pablo)* serves a *menu del día* with a mix of Spanish and International cuisine for 10€. And the atmosphere is a heckuva lot nicer than you'll find in many Spanish restaurants serving the dime dinner.

Abadia *($-$$, C/ San Pablo)* has a long, winding bar, dark spaces in the back set with upturned barrels and a decidedly medieval ambiance that makes for a cool, laid-back afternoon of snacking on *tapas* or the larger servings known as *raciones*. The tortillas, mixed with everything from spinach to asparagus to shrimp, and the *empanadas*, two layers of dough stuffed with various commodities and baked, are truly tasty!

Excursions from Salamanca

■ Ciudad Rodrigo

Ciudad Rodrigo would be overrun with tourists if it weren't for its lonesome placement near the border with Portugal, the Sierra de Francía and little else but the shepherds. This walled city is in a remarkable state of preservation. Its walls, with the help of restorations along the way, encircle the entire medieval city without interruption or noticeable ruin. You can even walk along the top of them and gaze out over the river Agueda and the **Puente Romano** that crosses it. The town, with just over 15,000 inhabitants, has a number of impressive Renaissance palaces and a 12th-century **Catedral** that stills bears cannon scars from a 19th-century battle during the War of Independence, when Napoleon's goons were finally run out of town. The 14th-century **Castillo de Enrique II** stands watch over the town and doubles as a tourist *parador*. Ciudad Rodrigo is 90 km (56 miles) southwest of Salamanca on the N-620. Ten or more buses per day run between Salamanca and Ciudad Rodrigo. The bus station is outside the walls in the west, just off Avda Yurramendi *(Campo de Toledo, s/n, ☎ 92 346 10 09)*.

■ Los Arribes

Adventures on Water

The **River Duero** cuts a dramatic, meandering course through granite hills and steep gorges on Salamanca's western border with Portugal. This frontier scenery is a world apart from the staked plains of the provincial interior. Known as Los Arribes, a grouping of quiet villages populates the banks and valleys around the Duero from the Aldeadávila dam in the north to the Saucelle dam in the south. On the same stretch, four smaller rivers, the Agueda, Uces, Tormes and Huebra, empty into the Duero from the east, adding their own impressive swaths through the granite landscape. The water, a dark emerald in color, flows slowly past Los Arribes, forming deep and wide pools at regular intervals, before it veers west across Portugal in the direction of the Atlantic. Leisure boating is paramount. In the summers, tourists can pile into large pontoon boats that run the course or rent canoes for guided floats. Arrangements can be made at the

rural tourism office **Quinta de la Concepción** *(Ctra Hinojosa de Duero-Salto de Saucelle, km 9.7, ☎ 92 351 30 70, www.ocioteca.com/laquinta)* next to the Presa de Saucelle (Saucelle dam), a few kilometers west from the village of the same name and north of the village Hinojosa de Duero. The pontoon ride costs 10€ per person and takes a little over an hour each way; it is best enjoyed with a bottle of wine and a pair of binoculars to view the many endangered raptors that make their nests in the granite cliffs of Los Arribes. These include Egyptian and griffon vultures, golden and Bonelli's eagles, and on a truly blessed day, eagle owls and black storks. (The latter are black except for a white underbelly, thus distinguishable from the more common white stork that only has a band of black along its wingtips.) Another guide service operates out of Salamanca should you want to make plans ahead of time. **El Corazón de Los Arribes** *(Paseo de Canalejas 106-108, Salamanca, ☎ 92 326 99 19, www.arribesturismo.com)* runs their pontoon boats on the smaller rivers that converge on the river Duero. The one-hour boat rides cost 9€ and two-hour rides are 15€.

Driving from Salamanca, you'll follow the course of the River Tormes for much of the way by heading west on the SA-300 to the town of Vitigundo and from there to Lumbrales. After Lumbrales, turn north toward Hinojosa de Duero (this town has a well-marked system of hiking trails; just look for the color charts marking the trailheads as you drive through town). From Hinojosa de Duero, the road winds along high cliffs with spectacular views of the valleys before you arrive at the **Salto de Saucelle** waterfalls and the rural tourism office.

With your own car, there is a great lookout point over the river Duero 10 minutes into Portugal after crossing the Saucelle dam. To reach the **Mirador Penedo Durao**, cross the bridge into Portugal. Three km (1.8 miles) later make a right at the T. Follow the road for another four km (2.5 miles) and where the road forks, make a left (heading south). Roughly three km (1.8 miles) later you'll veer off the main road onto a rocky one with signs indicating Poiares/Penedo Durao. When this road splits, turn left to reach the mirador.

■ Sierra de Béjar

Foothills – that's what a Coloradoan would call the **Sierra de Béjar**. This small range on Salamanca's southern boundary is a western extension of the Sierra de Gredos. It tops out at 2,401 m (7,875 feet) at the peak of Calvetero. In winter, snow covers much of the range, making for a good two to three months of ice climbing, tobogganing and snow skiing.

Béjar serves as the main base village for explorations into the range. The town has a history as a link in the wool trade that once constituted Castilla y León's main industry. Shops off the Plaza Mayor still sell its locally made capes and blankets. The modest **Museo Mateo Hernández** in the Gothic Iglesia de San Gil showcases Bejarano sculptures and late Spanish paintings. A walk in **El Parque de La Antigua** (ancient park, which it is, dated to the 11th century) is enhanced with panoramic views of the mountains. The **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** is at #6 Paseo de Cervantes, ☎ 92 340 30 05.

Where to Stay

The **Casa Inglesa del Castañar** *(C/ Rodeos del Castañar 25, ☎ 92 340 44 99)* is a cozy *casa rural* in town with three double rooms and decidedly mountain-country décor – far better than a hostel stay any day of the week. A double costs 55€, includes breakfast and allows access to the swimming pool. The nearest campground is five km (three miles) away in the Parque Natural de Candelario, next to the small village of the same name. **Camping Cinco Castaños** *(☎ 92 341 32 04)*, named for the chestnut trees growing in the park, is open from March through September. The site has a mini-market, showers and bath and all the necessary camper hook-ups. Space for a camper will cost 3.22€ per night and each adult and tent space is 3.01€.

■ Candelario

Candelario is a small pueblo a few kilometers out from Béjar with steep and narrow streets and not too much happening – which may be a welcome change after Salamanca. When the snow melts in the springtime the town is serenaded by the sounds of water running down the channels cut into the sides of these streets.

Adventures on Snow

From Candelario you access **La Covatilla Ski Resort** *(headquarters C/ 28 de Septiembre 22, in Béjar; reservations ☎ 92 341 08 85; information ☎ 65 097 36 00, www.sierradebejar-lacovatilla.com, gecobesa@algara.com)*. The road leading up to the resort is a steep, switchback route and, when the big luxury tour buses are lugging up it, very trying on the patience. It *should* take 10 minutes to reach the slopes from Candelario; but normally it takes 45. What you'll find at the top is a fierce wind with no trees to break it, a crowded parking lot, and one of Spain's most petite ski resorts. I can't claim to have skied it, just looked on and wondered why I would want to, while wishing that I was a kid again (they seem to be having much more fun than the adults, sledding down a maze of trails at the base of the slopes). The ski resort has one lift and two pomas and a total of five runs, all beginner to intermediate. The main lodge at the base of the slopes sells lift passes and rents ski equipment.

Burgos

Bitter cold in the winter, Burgos (population 161,984) doesn't really look or act the part of the once powerful capital of Christian Spain, which it was for 500 years. It maintains one of the country's most astonishing cathedrals as proof of the years when royalty and wool made it prominent, but many of its palaces and its castle were all but obliterated during waning years when the Napoleonic War was raging. Even so, Burgos is a lovely Gothic city walled by attractive 18th- and 19th-century buildings instead of rocks, spanning the banks of the River Arlanzón in an interesting province where remains of Europe's earliest known inhabitants have been found and where one of its most legendary figures, El Cid, lived. Add to these its role in the early Christian Reconquest, its leading position in medieval trade and its place in the Spanish Civil War, and Burgos can teach a great deal about Spain. In the summer-

time, with the influx of tourists, you may even get the strange sense that you're trapped in a small classroom with too many students.

Burgeños are a guarded lot not given to needless frivolities, but congenial nonetheless. Every year they welcome thousands of pilgrims to rest in their city during the month-long pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia (King Alfonso VIII founded the Hospital del Rey to welcome and tend to pilgrims along their way). And every year a few of the pilgrims like the city so much they decide to stay a little longer. I had the good fortune to meet one in particular that smiled when she reported she'd been on the Camino de Santiago for a year now but hadn't moved and didn't expect to complete her pilgrimage any time soon.

■ History

Alfonso III resettled the town of Burgos in 884 during the early stages of the Christian Reconquista. In the next century, Fernan Gonzalez made it capital of the county of Castile and in the 11th century, with the uniting of Castilla y León, Ferdinand I made it capital of Christian Spain. With the Moors' ultimate capitulation at Granada in 1492, the capital was moved to Valladolid. In the interim, the steady drive southward by the Christians into Moorish-controlled territory had trivialized the significance of Burgos, a far northern city that found itself increasingly distanced from the action. In consolation, Burgos' location near important mountain passes to the northern coast meant the city would not have to bemoan its lost royal entitlement. The city became the center of the flourishing wool trade known as *La Mesta*, an association of influential shepherds that owned title to the *cañadas* by which droves of merino sheep were pushed through Burgos en route to the seaport of Brugge in the Low Countries. The *Consulado de Burgos* was established to administer such trade affairs and Burgos found itself among the most prosperous cities in the country. The glory days lasted into the 17th century, when the relative monopoly on trade was weakened by increasing competition and by the Spanish Habsburgs' loss of Flanders to Austria.

The population in Burgos declined severely and, until the 20th century, the city made little news. Then the Spanish Civil War began its slow, guttural upheaval and the citizens of Burgos attracted the attention of Generalísimo Franco during a series of cruel dealings with Republican insurgents. Encouraged by the reports, Franco established his headquarters at Burgos during the Civil War and from there steered the course of contemporary Spanish history.

■ Tourist Information

You can consult the **Oficina de Turismo de la Junta de Castilla y León** *(Plaza Alonso Martínez 7, ☎ 92 720 31 25)* and the **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** *(Teatro Principal, Paseo del Espolón, s/n, ☎ 94 728 8874).*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: To reach the Estación de Tren *(Avda Conde de Guadalorce, s/n, ☎ 94 720 35 60)* follow the Paseo de la Isla along the river from the Arco de Santa María. At the Plaza de Castilla make a left, crossing the river, and continue walking straight on

the Conde de Guadalhorce that runs to the Plaza de la Estación. Eight to 10 trains per day run south to Madrid (five hours) and north to Bilbao (3½ hours). There are also multiple daily trains to **San Sebastián** (three hours), **León** (three hours), **Salamanca** (four hours) and **Barcelona** (11-12 hours).

By Bus: To reach the Estación de Autobuses *(Miranda 4, ☎ 94 728 88 55)*, leave the Casco Antiguo through the Arco de Santa María, cross the bridge over the river Arlanzón and continue for one block on Calle de Madrid. The bus station will be on the left. There are hourly buses to Madrid (2½-three hours), and four buses per day to Barcelona (seven-eight hours) vía Zaragoza. Five or more buses run per day to **San Sebastián** (4¾ hours), **Valladolid** (two hours), Zamora (two hours), **Logroño** (two hours) and **Santander** (three hours). One bus runs to **León** (3½ hours).

By Car: The N-1 runs north/south between Burgos and Madrid. Valladolid and Salamanca, farther on, are southwest on the N-620. In the direction of León the N-120 runs west and connects to the N-601 that runs north to this city. To reach the País Vasco take the A-1 northeast and at Vitoria-Gasteiz pick up the N-68 to either head north to Bilbao or west through Logroño in the direction of Cataluña.

■ Sightseeing

The image of Emperor Carlos V in the company of numerous local personages bears down from the **Arco de Santa María**, the main gateway into Burgos' Casco Antiguo. It's easiest to start a tour of the city at this point, with the river running by and marking the way to the two important sites outside the city (the Monasterio de las Huelgas to the west and La Cartuja de Miraflores to the east). The Catedral stands just inside the gate over the Plaza del Rey San Fernando. The Arco de Santa María, one of 12 gates that initially formed part of the medieval wall, was built in the 16th century and served as the meeting place of the powerful Consulado de Burgos until the 18th century.

La Catedral de Santa Iglesia

In 1221 King Ferdinand and the founding Bishop Mauricio laid the first stone of what would be Spain's third largest cathedral, eclipsed only by those in Sevilla and Toledo. The old Romanesque cathedral had been leveled and the new one would take three centuries and a slew of architects to embellish completely (in the early stages the prolific Gil de Siloe and his son Diego had a hand). While it is often the case in Spain that constructions spanning hundreds of years tend to pick up and or evolve from one style to the next (a Baroque façade with Gothic towers and a Mudéjar cloister, for example), the cathedral of Burgos emerged with the purest French Gothic sensibilities. It has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The twin towers poking up from the corners of the main façade were added in the 15th century and measure 84 m (275 feet) high. Entrance is through the Puerta de Santa María below them. Just inside to the left is the *papamoscas*

Queen of Swabia (1290s), Burgos Cathedral Cloister

(fly-catcher), a weird figure/clock that marks the hours by swallowing invisible flies. The curiosities don't stop here. To the right, the figure known as Christ the Saint of Burgos in the 14th-century Capilla de Santo Cristo is eerie enough, and just realistic enough, that church custodians prefer to tidy up its chapel during the day, when other people are around and all the lights are on. This crucifix figure of Jesus is a composite of animal and human parts and after seven centuries looks as if it could use a little nip and tuck.

Left of the transept, the immaculate Golden Staircase built by Diego de Siloé in the 16th century rises from the nave to an exterior door, making for what would be a rather grand emergency exit. The conspicuously marked tombs of El Cid and his wife Doña Jimenez lie below the elaborate 15th-century starred dome that casts light on the transept. The ostentation of these tombs is surpassed only by those of Don Pedro Fernández, the once enormously influential High Constable of Castile, who lies entombed alongside his wife in the garishly ornate Capilla de los Condestables just beyond the ambulatory. The Museo Catedralico is spaced around the 13th-century cloister with Flemish paintings on display, various El Cid regalia including his marriage papers and a priceless Visigothic bible. *(☎ 94 720 47 12, open Mon.-Sat. 9:30 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 9:30-11:45 am and 4-7 pm; entry to the Catedral is free; entry to the museum is 3.60€ or 2.40€ for students.)*

Beneath the Ruined Castle

Near the backside of the Catedral is the **Iglesia de San Nicolás**, a little 15th-century church with a big altarpiece and a big painting. The polychrome altarpiece was carved in alabaster by Francisco of Cologne in the 16th century. The dizzying work expounds on the holy life and stories of Saint Nicholas through various depictions. The big, brooding painting is of 16th-century Flemish origin and depicts the Final Judgment. *(☎ 94 720 70 95, open July-Sept., Mon.- Fri. 9 am-2 pm and 3-8 pm, Sat. 9 am-2 pm and 5-6 pm; rest of the year, Tues.-Fri. 6:30-7:30 pm, Sat. 9:30 am-2 pm and 5-7 pm; entry 1€).*

Following the Calle Pozo Seco into the heart of the Barrio del Castillo leads to the **Iglesia de San Esteban**. If it weren't for the show-stopping Catedral nearby, this church would impress. You might think it a modest Gothic feat but for the sheer age of the structure, which dates to 1280. The Museo de Retablo presents a compilation of 16th through 18th century altarpieces that have been raided from the various towns in the province *(☎ 947 20 43 80, open June-Oct., Tues.-Sat. 10:30 am-2 pm and 4:30-7pm, Sun. 1:30 am-2 pm).*

The ruined castle seated on a hill now converted into the **Parque del Castillo** can be reached by taking the steps opposite the front entrance from the church. Within the park, the *mirador del castillo* gives high views of the Catedral and city around it. The castle was blown to bits during the Napoleonic War. What's left is a chalky white brick pile dating to the 11th century.

Royal Monastery of Las Huelga

Outside the Casco Antiguo

In the park by the river I had asked an older man for directions to a restaurant in town, never having expected him to take me on a tour of the city that culminated at the desolate, almost ghost-town of the **Royal Monastery of Las Huelgas**. "Peregrino?" he asked. "No," I said, "I've got a car." The tour of the monastery consisted of his pointing at plaques and my reading them (the official and obligatory tour is given in Spanish every 30 minutes). What the man wasn't telling me was that the monastery was founded in 1187 by Queen Leonor of Aquitaine, wife of Alfonso VIII. It's a spectacular fenced complex and more than once my silent tourist guide shushed me so that I would not disturb the 35 Cistercian nuns living inside.

The church has three naves with a hoard of Gothic tombs attesting to its services as a pantheon; among the dead are King Alfonso VIII and his wife the founder, King Enrique I and his Queen Berenguela, and enough lesser royals linked to the Crown of Castile to fill a mass grave. Of its five chapels, the Mudéjar-style Capilla de Santiago contains a wooden image of the Apostle St. James with a moving arm once used to dub knights. The Sala Capitular (chapterhouse) displays the tent flap taken from the Moorish camp after the Christians had defeated them at Navas de Tolosa. The Monastery was commissioned during a celebratory high following the victory.

The monastery's **Museo de Ricas Telas** (medieval fabrics museum) is rich from pillaging. It displays the standard taken from the Arabs at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa and the royal garments taken from the cold bodies entombed in the monastery.

A fast walker can reach the Monasterio de las Huelgas Reales in 20 minutes from the Arco de Santa María. And it's a nice walk through the gardens along the river. Exiting from the Arco de Santa María, make a right and follow the Paseo de la Isla as far as the circular Plaza de Castilla. Cross the bridge and continue in the same direction on the opposite river bank. Past the next block, the Avda Monasterio de Las Huelgas can be picked up on the left. The other option is to catch bus 5 or 7 at one of the stops on the avenue that follows the river (it has many names depending where you are: Avda Valladolid, Sierra de Atapuerca, La Merced – all the same). *(☎ 94 720 16 30, open April-Sept., Tues.-Sat. 10:30 am-1:15 pm and 4-5:45 pm, Sun. 10:30 am-2:15 pm; Oct.-Mar., Tues.-Fri. 11 am-1:15 pm and 4-5:45 pm, Sun. 10:30 am-2:15 pm; entry 4.80€, students 2.40€ including a tour in Spanish.)*

Go the distance to the Carthusian monastery, **La Cartuja de Miraflores**, to see the beautiful works by Gil de Siloe, arguably the greatest 15th-century Spanish sculptor. The visit is restricted to the church built by Juan of Cologne in the Elizabethan Gothic style. Inside, Gil's mastery is evident in the starry funerary statues of King Juan II of Castille and Isabel of Portugal, the parents of Isabel la Católica. He is also responsible for the tombs of Juan de Padilla and Isabel's brother the Infante Alfonso, as well as the immaculate polychrome altarpiece, which is said to have been guilt with the first gold that arrived from the conquest of the New World. To reach the **Cartuja de**

Miraflores you'll more than likely want to catch the bus from Plaza de España. The nice walk follows the River Arlanzón to the east and makes a pass through the Parque de la Quinta; it takes upwards of an hour and is marked along the way. (The Church is open Mon.-Sat. 10:15 am-3 pm and 4-6 pm, Sun. 11:20 am-12:30 pm and 1-3 pm and 4-6 pm; free entry.)

■ Where to Stay

The **NH Palacio de la Merced** *($$$, C/ La Merced 13, ☎ 94 747 99 00, fax 94 726 04 26, nhpalmerced@nh-hoteles.es, d 145€)* occupies a 16th-century structure and looks to have been decorated by a very, very somber person. The interior Gothic cloister is fetching with a copula of gleaming crystal hovering over it and it does brighten the place up a little. The spacious bedrooms and public spaces are tastefully furnished with quality materials and draw a premium for their views of the Catedral. Nearby, the ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Mesón del Cid** *($$, C/ Fernán González 62, ☎ 94 720 87 15, mesondelcid@mesondelcid.es, d 112€)* is four-star accredited in a former 15th-century print shop. The Catedral is directly opposite within spitting distance and many of the rooms look on to it. Each is named for one or another of El Cid's friends or foes. They are adequately furnished but far from illuminating.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

A good bang for the buck is the ☆☆ **Hotel Norte y Londres** *($$, Plaza Alonso Martínez 10, ☎ 94 726 41 25, d 60€).* This hotel is centrally located with balconies overlooking an agreeable plaza. The furnishings are mostly antique, preserved from eons ago before the space was a hotel. The rooms are exterior and bright with modest furnishing; they don't appear to need a refurbishing for a good five years or so.

☆ **EC Hotel Jacobeo** *($$, C/ San Juan 24, ☎ 94 726 01 02)* is a small hotel with relatively new standards in a relatively historical building. The rooms are austere but comfortable. A double ranges from 45€-60€.

Hostal Joma *(C/ San Juan 26)* is located in the Casco Antiguo near all the action. It has seven simple double rooms with sink for 20€ per night. The bathroom and showers are communal. **Hostal Lar** *(C/ Cardenal Benlloc 1, ☎ 94 720 96 55, d 40€)* offers communal television and bathrooms that a full-grown man might have trouble fitting into. Nonetheless, this is a clean and accommodating hostel in a good zone for night owls.

■ What to Eat & Where

Off the beaten tourist path but a well-known local haunt, **Asador Los Trillos** *($$$, El Hospital del Rey, ☎ 94 746 00 26)* is located past the Barrio de las Huelgas near El Hospital del Rey. For a quick snack there is a selection of *chorizos*, *morcillas* (a spicy black sausage) and grilled peppers with anchovies at the bar just inside the entrance. Wander around and have a look at the photographs of mostly famous personalities that don't miss Los Trillos when they're in town, including the singer Paco DeLucia and bullfighter Angel Christo. The *comedor*, or dining room, is straight in the back, with long, heavy tables in a quasi-agrarian setting. House specialties include the *lechazo* (roast baby lamb), *salmón a las brasas* (grilled salmon) and various steaks. Next door is

the less traditional and less characteristic restaurant **Asador Azofra** ($$$$). It serves mostly the same dishes as Los Trillos (roast specialties of Castilla y León), but charges a little more and has a new-wave décor that just doesn't sit well with a vaulted brick open.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Restaurante La Cueva *($$, Plaza de Santa María 7, ☎ 94 720 86 71)* has about five tables in a cave just around from the Catedral. This is a cool dive with great food and if you manage to get Javier as a waiter then you'll have great, smiling service. The main entrées include *merluza* (hake fish) and *chuleta de cordero* (lamb chops).

On weekdays, **La Posada** *($$, Plaza Santo Domingo de Guzmán 18, ☎ 94 720 45 78)* offers an affordable *menu del día* with a selection of roast specialties. The restaurant occupies a number of floors in a historical home overlooking the busy Plaza Santo Domingo de Guzmán.

Los Herreros *(C/ San Lorenzo 26, ☎ 94 720 24 48)* is a popular *tapas* bar that is usually crowded with locals inside and out.

Excursions from Burgos

■ Prehistoric Atapuerca

At the end of the 19th century a mining railway was being cut through the diminutive Sierra de Atapuerca east of Burgos when a series of caverns laden with prehistoric fossils was unearthed. During the course of the next century a veritable goldmine of prehistoric sites was discovered dating back over a million years and marking the Sierra de Atapuerca as the earliest human settlement in Europe. Apart from a bevy of crude tools and animal parts, the remains of a new species were discovered in 1994 in a dig called Gran Dolina. Known as the Homo Antecessor and thought to be a cannibalistic ancestor of Neanderthals and Homo sapiens, they are among the oldest of the discoveries in the area, dating back some 800,000 years. The cave drawings in the Cueva Mayor have been dated to 40,000 years and indicate the arrival of Homo sapiens in Europe. Today the entire area is one massive, ongoing archeological dig that continues to yield new and astonishing evidence about the ones that came before. In 2000, after another significant find of human remains dating to the Middle Pleistocene epoch, UNESCO declared Atapuerca a Heritage of Mankind site.

The guided tour begins at the reception office of Paleorama in the village of Atapuerca. After a brief introduction and explanation of the sites, the tour proceeds alongside the trench cut in the 19th century for the mining railroad. There is an outer track just to the left of the departure point for the inner track by which you can make a free tour of the site. **Paleorama** *(Plaza Pablo García, s/n, ☎ 94 743 04 73, fax 94 743 04 84, www.paleorama.es, infomacion@paleorama.es)* is comprised of a revolving group that includes archeologists, teachers, biologists and others who have come to study the pre-historical discoveries at Atapuerca. The tours cost 3€ per person and last approximately two hours. Call ahead in the winter. The site is open on Sat. and Sun. mornings in the winter and Wed.-Sun. morning and afternoon during the summer . To reach Atapuerca from Burgos (it's only 15 minutes away)

take the N-120 east toward Logroño. At kilometer 93.5 turn off from Santovenia. Atapuerca is a few minutes farther north.

■ Adventures on Water: The Río Ebro

The Ebro, Spain's longest river, originates from springs in the Cantabrian Mountains and cuts east across the northern expanse of the Burgos province en route to the Mediterranean near Tarragona. It divides the green and mountainous northern region of Burgos – a landscape more characteristic of the autonomous communities that make up "Green Spain" on the Atlantic coast – from the southern flatlands of Burgos that typify Castilla y León. For much of its course the River Ebro is muddy and sluggish, but in pockets, as near the small town of Valdenoceda, it gathers speed in narrow canyons and whips up wild rapids. **Rafting Alto Ebro** *(Barrio Grande, 09559 Valdenoceda, Burgos, ☎ 94 730 30 91)* is the main rafting guide service in the town. A half-day rafting trip down the Ebro costs 33€ per person. The company also rents canoes for 12€ per hour and maintains El Arco, a *casa rural* with rooms for rent. Valdenoceda is 40 minutes north of Burgos. Take the N-627 north from the city and, after passing Sotopalacios, turn off onto the C-629 in the direction of Peñahorada. Continue on the C-629 as far as its intersection with the N-232, where you'll find the river and Valdenoceda alongside it.

León

One of the largest provinces in Spain, León is the middle ground between the green, mountainous regions of northern Spain and the harsh monotony of the arid central plateau. Across the northern expanse of the province it shares the Cantabrian Pyrenees with Galicia, Asturias and Cantabria. This sparse, rugged landscape is a haven for the rare brown bear and wolf. It's dotted with small villages that see few tourists and the rustic *hórreos* or granaries emblematic of traditional agriculture in these regions. Peaks are snow-covered for much of the year and give way to numerous slopes maintained for skiers. With the snow melt, climbers brace for the summit and throughout the year cavers can explore a vast network of underground caverns. The province is laced by rivers flowing south from these mountains, yielding trout to fishermen and spreading green across the stark sheep territory in the south.

The Virgen Blanca (1250-75), Cathedral, León

■ History

In the provincial capital, the Leónes take pride in their history as a seat of the Christian Reconquest. Their city was founded at the confluence of the Rivers Bernesga and Torio as the Legio VII Gemina Pia Felix by the Romans in 68 AD and charged with overseeing mines in the area. It was occupied briefly by the Visigoths and then the Moors before King Ordoño I made it part of the kingdom of Asturias in the ninth century. León would serve as a base for the southward push of the reconquest and in due time reclaim Salamanca, Valladolid, Palencia and Zamora. The city suffered a devastating blow in the 10th cen-

tury when the Moorish ruler Almanzor, in a lethal push across the region, burned it down. León was gradually repopulated and slowly rose from the ashes under King Alfonso V. By the 12th century, with the establishment of the Court of the Kingdom of León, the city was home to one of the earliest parliaments in Europe. The great cathedral was built and owed its styling in part to France, linked to the city via the pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. With the betrothal of King Fernando of Castilla to Sancha of León a century later, the two kingdoms of Castilla and León were united once and for all.

■ The City Today

León is a walker's city. Where the outlying streets are jammed with traffic, most of the attractive Casco Antiguo is only accessible by foot. The cathedral is the heart of this bustling area. Around it are the narrow and winding streets of the city's oldest neighborhoods. Though the city's name is derived from the Roman Legion, the lion is the symbol of the city and makes regular appearances wherever you go. The Leónes like the symbolism inherent in the noble lion. It could be said that the Leónes are not quite as friendly as their neighbors the Galicians but far more inviting than the Catalans. They are without apology a prideful people and this, if nothing else, makes them truly Spanish.

■ Useful Information

Tourist Office

León's main office is located across from the cathedral's front entrance *(Plaza de Regla 3, ☎ 98 723 70 82)*.

Internet

There are two Internet cafes within a five-minute walk from Plaza Santo Domingo. For **Bluenet** *(C/ Lope de Vega 7, ☎ 98 723 54 38)*, walk up Ramón y Cajal and make the first left on C/ Lope de Vega. For **Locutorio La Rúa-Cibercentro**, which is fundamentally an international phone-calling center with some computers, walk up C/ de Ancha and, after passing the Plaza de San Marcelo, make a right on C/ La Rúa.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: León's train station *(Avda de Astorga, s/n, ☎ 98 727 02 02)* is southwest from the city center and across the Río Bernesga. It's a 15-minute walk into town. From the station, cross the river on the Avenida de Palencia and continue straight ahead (the avenue becomes Avda de Ordoño II) to the Plaza Santo Domingo. Daily destinations include **Astorga** (45 minutes); **Madrid** (up to 10 trips, 4½ hours); **Barcelona** (two-three trips, 10 hours); **Bilbao** (one trip, five-six hours); **Burgos** (two trips, 2½ hours).

By Bus: The bus station *(Paseo del Ingeniero Saenz de Miera, s/n, ☎ 98 721 10 00)* is also across the river, a few blocks east of the train station. Calle Sancho el Gordo reaches it from the Avda de Palencia. Daily destinations include **Astorga** (frequent, 30 minutes); **Madrid** (up to 12 trips daily, four hours); **Burgos** (two hours); **Bilbao** (4½ hours) and **San Sebastián** (5½ hours).

By Car: From Madrid by car, either take the slower N-601 northwest in a straight shot to León or take the A-1/N-VI as far as Benavente and there pick

up the N-630 north. The N-630 runs south to Salamanca and north to Oviedo. The N-120 runs west to Astorga and east to Burgos.

■ Sightseeing

León's historical center is north of the Río Bernesga. Most of the sights are gathered in the areas of the Barrio Húmedo and the Cathedral. The **Barrio Húmedo** is León's oldest neighborhood, a lively and entertaining area crowded with *tapas* bars and shops worth getting lost in for a few hours. From the Plaza Santo Domingo the main pedestrian thoroughfare, **Calle de Ancha**, divides the two and amasses crowds of window shoppers and gawkers en route to and from the Cathedral. The **Convento de San Marcos**, the only major tourist site outside of these areas, is on the river bank to the northwest. It's a 15-minute walk from the Plaza Santo Domingo by following the Avda del Padre Isla and, at its intersection with Avda de Suero de Quiñones, making a left.

La Catedral (La Pulchra Leonina)

There is an appreciable levity to León's Gothic cathedral. Standing before it in the Plaza Regia, it appears more glass than stone and, were it not for the series of buttresses embracing the apse, a light wind might easily topple it. In total there are 125 stained glass windows, plus 57 circular ones and four enormous roses – more than any other Spanish cathedral can claim ("glory," the largest rose window centered on the west façade between the twin 200-foot towers, measures eight m/26 feet in diameter). Finely detailed and with all the brilliance of a kaleidoscope, these panes depict biblical stories, regional lore and travails of the pilgrims en route to Santiago de Compostela. If you're standing inside with the sun shining through this array of colors, the cathedral almost sparkles.

Building was begun in 1225 during the reign of King Alfonso the Wise over the former site of King Ordoño's palace. Many of the workers that had contributed to Burgos' cathedral were dispatched to León for the construction and the two share unmistakable similarities, most notably in the French-influenced vaults and buttresses. And, like its sister cathedral, León's is a jewel of purely Gothic styling. No changes were made to the original plan during the 100 years of construction and, other than routine maintenance, there have been no additions since. There are worries, though, that pollution is beginning to take a toll on the cathedral's soft sandstone surface. *(Plaza de Regla, ☎ 98 787 57 70, open daily July-Sept., 8:30 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm; Oct.-June, 8:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-7 pm.)*

The **Museo Catedralicio Diocesan** is spread throughout the chapter rooms surrounding the cloister. Along with the large store of codexes, there are numerous early Romanesque sculptures of the crucifixion and the Virgin Mary as well as a notable plateresque staircase and altarpiece by Juan de Badajoz. *(The museum is open July-Sept., 9:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-6:30 pm;*

Oct.-June, Mon.-Fri. 9:30 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. 9:30 am-1:30 pm; entry 3.50€.)

Convento de San Marcos

Blister-footed pilgrims have long considered the stretch of the Camino de Santiago passing by León one of the most grueling parts of the walk. In 1173 the convent of San Marcos was established and, along with it, the Knights of the Order of St. James, an elite military contingent charged with protecting the pilgrims and Christianity from the Moors. The convent served as a hospital where those weary pilgrims could rest and rehabilitate. Nothing of the original convent remains; in its place the 300-foot-long rectangular Renaissance structure with its exquisite plateresque façade was begun in 1513. Adorning the 18th-century Baroque portal is an equestrian sculpture of the Apostle St. James, while inside the church is decorated with scalloped shells, the symbol of pilgrims along the *camino*. Though mass is still held in the church, the convent has since been converted into one of Spain's most splendid tourist *paradors*. In building the Hostal San Marcos, every attempt was made to preserve the original construction. If you look closely enough on the old church walls that now double as part of the *parador's* walls, you'll notice names and dates scratched into them by pilgrims hundreds of years ago. The monastery no longer exists, and a hotel and the provincial archeological museum now occupy its space. The **Museo de León** claims part of the cloister and, in addition to a collection of 10th- and 11th-century liturgical pieces, it displays mostly archeological relics. *(Plaza de San Marcos, C/ Sierra Pambley 4, ☎ 98 724 50 61, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8:30 pm; entry 1.20€.)*

La Basilica de San Isidro

Rebuilt in the 12th century after the Moorish ruler Almanzor had burned down the original church along with most of the town, the Basilica of San Isidro is considered a leading example of early Romanesque Spanish architecture. It was consecrated in honor of San Isidro, whose remains were retrieved from Moorish-controlled Sevilla and entombed here. The remains of 11 Leónes Kings and their families lay in the Panteón de los Reyes, a burial chamber founded by King Ferdinand I and Doña Sancha in the 11th century. Here, the Romanesque art is brazen, beautiful and astonishingly well preserved (thanks to the dry, cool confines of the crypt). The vaults, arches and ceiling domes are adorned with beautiful 12th-century Romanesque frescoes depicting a variety of scenes from the New Testament, including the Last Supper, the Annunciation and the intriguing Tetramorph, in which the four evangelists have animal heads – a bull, an eagle, a lion and, of course, a man. Entrance to the museum includes access to the Royal Panteón as well as to the library and treasury. Among the artifacts is a handwritten 10th-century Visigothic bible, the Reliquary of San Isidro and the ornate, gem-studded chalice of Doña Urraca. *(Plaza de San Isidro, ☎ 98 722 96 08, open Tues.-Sat. 9 am-2 pm and 3-8 pm; entry 3€.)*

Other Sights

In 1893 35-year-old Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí was busy overseeing the reconstruction of the Episcopal Palace in nearby Astorga when he was commissioned to build the **Casa de Botines** in León. In light of the whimsical modernism for which he is famous, the Neo-Gothic Casa de Botines might

appear reserved, even serious. The somber mansion is composed of heavy gray stone masonry and dark slate roofs with narrow spires rising from the front corners. Almost as an afterthought, Gaudí decided to add a sculpture of his native Cataluña's patron Saint George slaying an alligator, perhaps to give the place a little life. The **Palacio de los Guzmanes** faces the Plaza de San Marcelo across from the *Ayuntamiento* or town hall. It was built in the 16th century around the same time as the Renaissance palace was going up and the heavy ironwork that characterizes it was installed. Today it serves as the offices of the County Council. To the rear of the palace is the **Parque de El Cid**, named for the legendary anti-hero who once lived just down the street. A few Roman ruins have been preserved in the park. If you happen to be in town on Saturday, an outdoor market is held in the Plaza Mayor.

■ Adventures on Foot

*The bi-monthly culture and leisure guide **Lee.ón** is available for free at the tourist offices and lists upcoming sporting events, concerts, exhibitions, fiestas and the like.*

If you've had enough culture for the day, head toward the river. The **Jardines Papalaguinda** is a landscaped park with walking paths running along the north bank of the Río Bernesga. Take some wine, take some pictures or just take your loved one and have a stroll. Another green option is the **Parque de San Francisco**. This is the city's main park, small but attractive, with the gardens and walks designed to conform to the fountain of Neptune in the center (the Avda de Independencia leads to it from the Plaza de Santo Domingo).

■ Where to Stay

Topping the list with good reason is the **Parador Hostal San Marcos** *($$$, Plaza de San Marcos 7, ☎ 98 723 73 00, fax 98 723 34 58, www.parador.es, d 120€)*. Formerly the convent of San Isidro founded by the Order of Santiago, this massive 15th-century Renaissance abode still seams to echo the prayers of nuns and knights. The conversion to a *parador* has done little to temper the original appearance and much to preserve its stunning antiquity. The intricate plateresque façade gives way to interior spaces that are elegant and plush. A coffered Mudéjar ceiling hangs above the lounge. Dining tables look down on the gardens of the original cloister. A number of the rooms share the stone walls of the church. An annex was added to accommodate the influx of tourists during the high-season and, although it lacks the quality of the original rooms, it nonetheless borrows some of the grandeur of its setting.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

La Posada Regia *($$, C/ Regidores 11, ☎ 98 721 31 73, fax 98 721 30 31, marquitos@regialeon.com, d 84€)* is a worthy alternative to the Parador and

a mite cheaper. This historical house dates to the early 19th century, though the 14th-century basement is preserved and, in it, remains of a wall dating to AD 50. Quality antique furnishings and Astorgan rugs decorate the comfortable and classy rooms, each of which is named for a particular bird or river found in the province of León.

The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Paris** *($$, C/ Ancha 18, ☎ 98 723 86 00, fax 98 727 15 72, hparis@lesein.es, d 65€)* is centrally located on the busy pedestrian street of Anchas, near to the Catedral and the popular Barrio Húmedo. Once a run-down one-star, the hotel was recently overhauled and upgraded to a three-star rating. The rooms are modern and adequately equipped.

Hostal San Martín *(Plaza Torres de Omaña, ☎ 98 787 51 87, fax 98 787 52 49, www.sanmartinhostales.com, d 35€)* is possibly the nicest budget accommodation in town. After passing through the creaking wooden door into the foyer, take the stairs to the left up to the first floor. The entire place has recently been refurbished, with wooden floors, spacious en suite bathrooms with tub and windows that open up to small balconies overhanging a cute little courtyard.

Hostal Reina *(Puerta de la Reina 2, ☎ 98 720 52 12)* is a small hostel and old, very old. Rooms are heated in the winter, have televisions and come with (35€) or without bath (25€).

■ What to Eat & Where

The *cocido maragato* is a staple of Leones cuisine and rules apply to its consumption. This variation of the chickpea stew contains seven different meats, chickpeas and other vegetables in a broth flavored with garlic and parsley. According to local custom, the meat must be eaten first, followed by the vegetables and then the broth; without a way to preserve the dish, it was deemed crucial that, if there were any leftovers, it should be the soup rather than the meats. The popular *botillo* is goat entrails stuffed with pork and smoked. You may run across frog legs (*pierna de rana*), dried and salted cod (*bacalao salteado*) and wild game; the menu might also include roasts (*asados*) and other common Spanish dishes such as *migas* (fried breadcrumbs) and *callos* (entrails served Leónes-style in a black sauce). ***Tapas* bars** are clustered in two main areas of the historical center: around the Plaza de San Martín in the Barrio Húmedo and in the Barrio Romántico in and around Calle del Cid and the Jardín del Cid. The emphasis is on cold and cured meats, stuffed peppers from Bierzo, *chorizos* and *empanadas* (heavy pastries), though you'll find some seafood (particularly octopus from nearby Galicia) and vegetable choices as well.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

In the Barrio Húmedo, **Vivaldi** *($$$$, C/ Platería 4, ☎ 98 726 07 60)* is recognized as one of the best restaurants in León. It has a *tapas* bar up front but for the fine dining it is recommendable to make reservations, as the place fills up in the high season. House specialties include *garbanzos con gambas* – a mix of prawns and chickpeas, fried cod with almonds in a chicken sauce – and

venison with liver pâté. You can also opt for the tasting menu, spelled out: *menu de degustación*.

El Faisán Dorado *($$$, C/ Cantareros 2, ☎ 98 725 66 09)* is another exceptional restaurant in the area. The French influence is obvious, with crêpes, pâtés and foie gras. In the summers you can dine outside on the terrace.

Lesser choices in the Barrio Húmedo include the oft-crowded **El Besugo** *($$, C/ Azabachería 10)*. This is a popular *tapas* stop with a choice of *pinchos* (small servings of bread topped usually with meats or cheeses and served with a toothpick). For these, simply ask the bartender for a plate (*me das in plato por favor*) and then pick whichever ones you want. Once you're finished, the bartender will count the toothpicks in order to charge you. The fried calamari is another good choice here.

La Traviata *(Plaza Mayor 19, ☎ 98 720 91 33)* blends festive colors and flourescent artwork with rugged rock walls and exposed timber beams. The menu is affordable and a blend of Spanish and international recipes.

Taberna El Llar *(Plaza de San Martín 9, ☎ 98 725 42 87)* in the popular plaza of the Barrio Húmedo serves a variety of *tapas* washed down with wines from the province of León, typically a young red from Valdevimbre or Los Oteros.

El Palomo *($$, Escalerilla 8, ☎ 98 725 60 18)* is in an old tavern with a conservative menu based on regional fare. With a sparkling claret wine in hand, opt for the *almejas* (clams) or *pimientos de Bierzo* (mild peppers), which are quite common in these parts.

Pizzería la Competencia *($, C/ Matasiete 9, C/ Mulhacín 8, C/ Conde Rebolledo 17, ☎ 98 721 63 07)*, with two of its three locations in the Barrio Húmedo, makes great hand-tossed pizzas and always draws a crowd of students.

La Lola *($, C/ Ruíz de Salazar 22, ☎ 98 722 43 03)*, in the Barrio Romántico, is a stylish two-floor café that has live acoustical music in the evenings. Another café that sports terrific views of the Cathedral and in the mornings serves fresh squeezed orange juice with coffee and a pastry for 3€ is **Café Europa**, off the Plaza la Regla.

■ Nightlife

To people-watch over a drink at an outdoor table, one good choice is **Plaza San Martín** in the **Barrio Húmedo**. Facing away from the Palacio de Guzmanez on Calle de Ancha, take Calle Generalisímo Mola, pass around the Iglesia de Santa Marina and make a left on C/ Azabechería. Another good spot is the 17th-century Baroque **Plaza Mayor** (from the Plaza Regia take C/ M.D. Berrueta and make an immediate left past the Iglesia de San Salvador de Palat del Rey). Both plazas are lined with restaurants and bars and when the sun goes down they become the centers of León's nightlife scene. The bars usually open up around 6 pm and some don't close until 4 or 5 am. There are also a few bars along the sweeping medieval **Calle de Cervantes** north of Calle de Ancha.

Excursions from León

■ Astorga

An afternoon is well spent in Astorga, a medieval city wrapped in the ruins of a Roman wall at the foot of the Montes de León. As early as the first century BC Astorga**,** then called Asturica Augusta, was an important Roman settlement charged with controlling the distribution of gold mined from the surrounding area.

Getting Here & Away

Without a rental car, the bus is the easiest way to get from León to Astorga. It's a 30-minute haul made by up to 15 buses per day. The **Estación de Autobuses** is just outside the wall from the Catedral *(Avda Ponferrada, s/n, ☎ 98 761 91 00)*. There are a few trains that run between León and Astorga, but you'll want to catch a taxi into town from the **Estación de Trenes** *(Plaza de la Estación, ☎ 98 761 64 44)*. With a car, the N-120 runs between León and Astorga to the west.

Sightseeing

An exquisite 17th-century Baroque ***Ayuntamiento*** (town hall) crowns Astorga's Plaza Mayor; behind it are the excavated ruins of a Roman mansion floored with an intricate mosaic. Other **Roman ruins** are scattered throughout the city: the **Ergástula**, a subterranean chamber believed to have held Roman slaves; the **Basilica** next to the forum and the **Museo Romano** on Calle General Mola; the public baths off Calle Santiago Crespo; and a drainage system that still feeds through the Parque de Sinagoga. To tour all the Roman remains of Astorga, stop by the **Oficina de Turismo** *(across from the Palacio Episcopal on C/ Glorieta Eduardo Castro, ☎ 98 761 82 22)*, which supplies free maps of the Ruta Romana and leads guided tours during the summer. From the Parque de Sinagoga, the promenade of Blanco de Cela leads through a picturesque part of the city along the Roman walls to the square of the Marquises of Astorga, whose 15th-century castle was leveled in 1872 by Napoleon's troops. From the square, Calle Leopoldo Panero runs to the Catedral and the Palacio Episcopal de Astorga.

The 15th-century **Catedral** maintained the floor plan of an earlier Romanesque cathedral. In the 250 years it took for completion, the Cathedral endured the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and devastating bombardment during the Napoleonic invasion. As a result of time and turmoil, it is a blend of styles, fundamentally Gothic with buttresses and knobby spires, but prominently displaying a Baroque doorway, a Renaissance bell tower and beautiful plateresque south façade and a Neo-Classical cloister. The **Museo de la Catedral** houses a collection of Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque art, including elaborately embellished royal chests and the reliquary of the Lignum Crucis. *(Plaza de la Catedral, ☎ 98 761 58 20, open 9 am-noon and 5-6:30 pm; the museum is open summers 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, winters 11 am-2 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm.)*

Near the Cathedral is the 19th-century Palacio Episcopal de Astorga. In 1886 the residence of Astorga's prelate, Bishop Grau, burned down. The Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí was chosen to rebuild the **Palacio Episco-**

Bishop's Palace by Gaudi

pal de Astorga largely because he was from the bishop's hometown of Reus. Gaudí, who was too preoccupied with his work on the other side of the country to spend much time in Astorga, designed a new Gothic palace based on reports and old photographs. The design was turned down by the local academy and, after extensive changes, work was begun, during which Bishop Grau died. Further disagreements with the local academy led Gaudí to abandon the project and take his crew with him. The Neo-Gothic palace was roofless for 20 years until a Madrileño, Ricardo García Guereta, was commissioned to complete it. Inside, the **Museo de los Caminos** displays regalia related to the Camino de Santiago, along with a collection of gold and silverware, Roman relics and Gothic art. *(Plaza de Eduardo de Castro, ☎ 98 761 68 82, open Mon.-Sat. summers 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, winters 11 am-2 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm; entry 2.50€.)*

The **Museo de Chocolate** divulges the sweet history of Astorga's 18th-century chocolate industry. With the arrival of cocoa beans from the New World to nearby Galician ports, Astorga became one of the country's leading producers of chocolate. Here you can sample chocolate based on 200-year-old recipes and come away with a new appreciation for Toblerone and Hershey's. *(C/ de José M. Goy, ☎ 98 761 62 20, open noon-2 pm and 6-8 pm, entry free.)*

■ Las Médulas

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Las Médulas is a dramatic landscape of orange-tinted cliffs, cavities and spires carved in the search for gold by Roman slaves over 2,000 years ago. Scattered in the environs are the interesting ruins of *castros*, fortified settlements centered around a circular home built by the native Asturs to protect themselves and defend their gold as early as the Bronze Age. The Asturs were a fiercely barbaric tribal race and, along with the neighboring Cantabros, were the last inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula to be subdued by the Romans in battles that occurred sometime around 25 BC. The Roman historian Florus described the aftermath: "Augustus ordered that the land be mined. Thus, toiling away under the earth, the Asturs came to discover their own riches in seeking them for the benefit of others." In the centuries to follow, the site was highly productive and recognized as the Roman Empire's largest gold mine in Hispania. Then in the third century AD, for reasons still not understood, the Romans abruptly ceased their mining activities in the area.

Adventures on Foot

There is a well-marked one-km trail leading out of the town of Las Médulas to the gaping **Cueva de la Encantada** (enchanted cave). The best spot to take in the whole site and snap pictures is from the **Mirador de Orellán**, a lookout point set on a 100-m/328-foot cliff. The mirador is well signposted in the nearby town of Orellán. From the mirador, there is an easy six-km/3.7-mile hiking trail, with informative panels placed near points of interest along the way, that leads back to the town of Las Médulas.

Las Médulas is 20 km (12.5 miles) southwest of Ponferrada in León's easternmost district of El Bierzo. For greater insight into the area, it's worth stopping first at the **Aula Arqueológica**, a visitors' center with informative models and displays located in the small town of Las Médulas. From Ponferrada, take the N-VI west and at La Barosa turn south on the N-536. At Carucedo turn off at the signs for Las Médulas.

■ San Isidro & Leitariegos

Adventures on Snow

Two ski resorts lie north of León in the mountains of the Cordillera Cantábrica. **Estación Invernal de Leitariegos** is the smaller of the two, located in the northwest of the province on the border with Asturias. Small, in fact, is an understatement. With a modest peak of 1,700 m (5,576 feet) and no snow-making abilities, a trip to ski here is hit-or-miss. You should call ahead of time for a rundown of the current surface conditions. The resort has a total of six runs with difficulty from easy greens through moderate blues to above-average reds. It's a lot of up and down, up and down, as the runs are short and connected only by one seated lift and two poma-lifts. A small shop rents skis and sells lift passes at the base. *(Apartado 35, 24100 Villablino; resort ☎ 98 768 81 04, reservations ☎ 98 749 03 50, fax 98 749 03 50; dlesqui@argored.com.)*

To reach Leitariegos from León it's an hour and a half drive and well worth the sightseeing through the mountains. Take the C-623 northwest almost all the way. At Villablino, the highway merges with another and becomes C-631; continue on through Caboalles de Abajo, which is a few kilometers south of the Puerto de Leitariegos and the resort.

Estación Invernal de San Isidro is northeast from León in the mountains on its border with Asturias. Snowboarders will be happy to know that there is a half-pipe on the hill and die-hard bump skiers have three challenging black runs to filet. Of the five ski resorts in the Cordillera Cantábrica, San Isidro is one of the two largest and snowiest. The other is Valgrande/Pajares, officially in Asturias but closer to the city of León than its own two resorts. All told there are 23 runs serviced by four seated lifts and eight poma-lifts. The majority are mid-level blues and reds, with a couple of green beginner runs *(Puebla de Lillo; resort ☎ 98 773 11 16, reservations ☎ 98 773 11 15, fax 98 773 11 07).*

San Isidro is a little over an hour away from León, depending on the bus traffic. Take the N-621 northeast and pick-up the LE-V-3141 heading north in the direction of Boñar. After passing this city, continue north on the LE-331. The road will wind around the lake or Embalse de Porma in the direction of the Puebla de Lillo Redipollos. A kilometer past the exits for this small village, veer left on the LE-332, following the signs to the resort.

Extremadura

"The sturdy cork-oaks, without any other inducement than that of their own generosity, shed their thick, light bark with which men first covered their houses, supported on rustic poles only as a defense against the inclemencies of the heavens." Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

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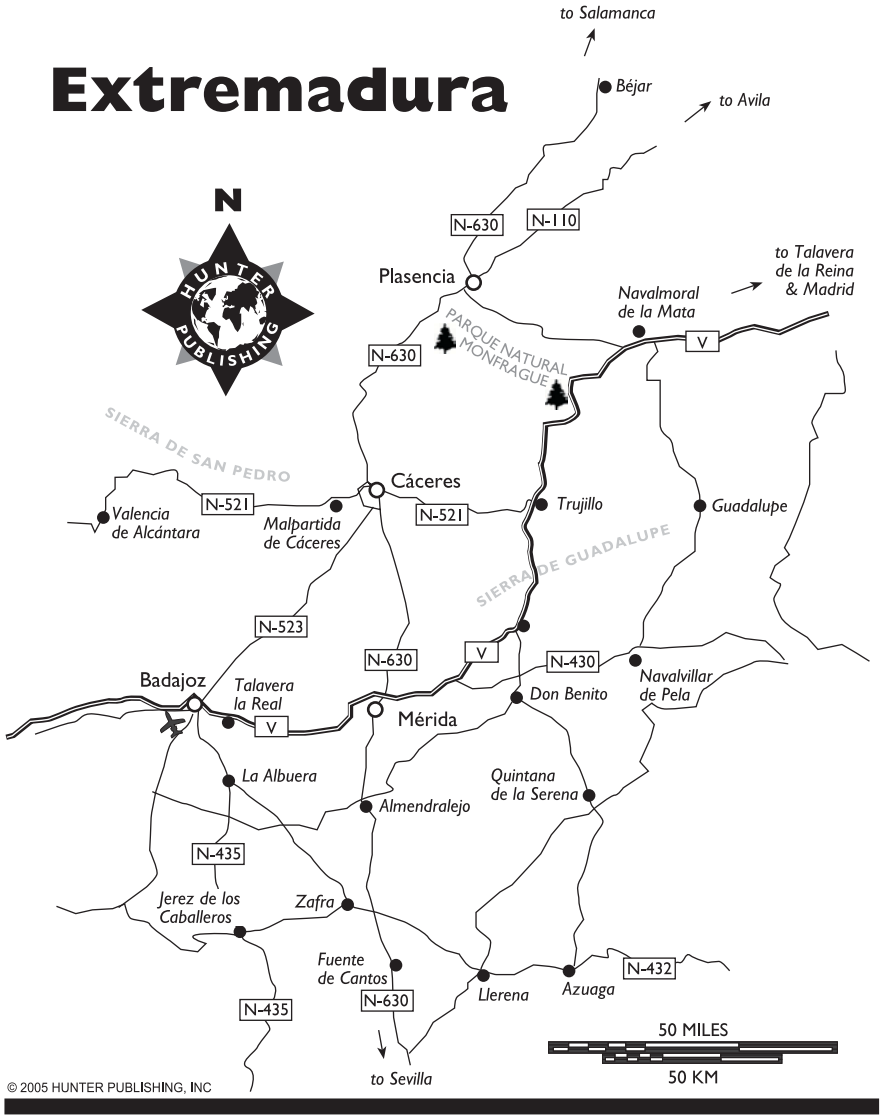
Extremadura has traditionally been the land left behind. During the Spanish conquest of America it was the region that contributed the greatest number of bodies to the effort-strong, naturally hardened young men who, finding little in the way of a livelihood in this poor realm, signed on as soldiers and ended up conquering foreign empires. Except for a few of its larger settlements, the great wealth accumulated in colonizing the Americas rarely found its way back to this, the most deserving realm of the motherland. Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, poor agricultural workers were forced to migrate in droves to the cities of Madrid or Barcelona in search of factory jobs. As a result, Extremadura now has one of the oldest populations of any Spanish region. And still today, with its bounty of pre-historic relics, a great and visible Roman legacy and terrain shifting from bleak plains to blossoming valleys and snow-capped peaks, tourists tend to shy away from this borderland in southwestern Spain. They opt, instead, for the sure bet in neighboring Andalucía or Castilla y León. And lonely Extremadura carries on as the country's best-kept secret.

Extremadura is one of Spain's largest regions as well as its least populated. It is divided into two provinces, **Cáceres** in the north and **Badajoz** to the south, with the Río Tajo (Tagus) diced into reservoirs as it drains westward through the north and the Guadiana carving a green stretch through the flat plains of the south.

The name Extremadura has been interpreted to mean various things: extreme, distant, tough, far-off winter grazing lands. Most likely the name arose during the Christian Reconquest and referred to lands outside of Moorish control. Thus regions farther north, which the Christians typically maintained, occasionally were called 'extremadura' until it was decided that only the large region bordering Portugal in the southwest of Spain would carry the name.

This area sits on the declining edge of the country's high central plain. Foothills rise near its borders in the north, south and east, before respectively becoming the mountains of the Central Range, the Sierra Morena and the Montes de Toledo in neighboring provinces. Plains are common in the interior and rain is not so common. Winters are relatively dry and mild, while summers are a raging inferno. The shepherds and pig farmers that continue to play a key role in the region's economy have little say in these matters.



Connecting the Conquistadors

In tourist literature, Extremadura is often referred to as the "Cradle of the Conquistadors." During the early and mid-16th century, thousands of Extremadurans are credited with having traveled to the New World in search of the riches and fame that promised to come through its discovery. In seeking an explanation as to why Extremadura, a region that has traditionally played such a small role within the country, played the largest role during her expansion, academicians are apt to cite little more than the prevailing Extremaduran landscape – harsh and unforgiving and thus the

Balboa

most likely to have bred the tough stock necessary to withstand the rigors of the conquest. Five Extremaduran towns are often sought out by the tourist looking to learn of the most famous of these men that left these places behind.

The paths of Extremadura's three most revered conquistadors would cross first on Hispaniola, the small island off the West Indies (present day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) that Columbus had landed on in 1492. While **Vasco Núñez de Balboa** (1475-1519), born in Jerez de los Caballeros and more commonly known in Spain as Núñez, was serving as part of a crew exploring the coast of Colombia, **Francisco Pizarro** (1475-1541) of Trujillo arrived in 1502 at Santa Domingo, the capital of Hispaniola that had been established by its first royal governor, Fray Nicolás de Ovando. The governor was credited (or blamed, depending on how you look at it) with establishing the *encomienda* system, a way of forcing uncooperative Indians to labor in exchange for religious assurances. By 1504, **Hernán Córtez** (1485-1547) of Medellín had reached Hispaniola and was busying himself with work as a public notary and plantation farmer. Balboa, following his arrival on Hispaniola, tried farming as well, but was less successful.

Córtez

In the ensuing years, Fray Nicolás was relieved from his post as a result of his brutality toward the Indians, Balboa was broke and had stowed away on a provision boat headed to Colombia to escape the creditors that were after him in Hispaniola, and Córtez was sailing under Diego Velazquez to conquer Cuba. By 1510 Balboa had recovered, been appointed governor of Darién, a settlement on the Isthmus of Panamá, and was making a name for himself (not to mention arousing controversy back in Spain) for his exploration tactics, which included torturing Indians and sicking vicious war dogs on them in order to gain information. In this way he first learned of the great sea to the south and the rich lands around it. Balboa sent word to King Ferdinand II in hopes of gaining support to explore the region, but because of the negative hype surrounding his exploits in the New World, he was not given a command and instead the aging nobleman **Pedro Arias Dávila** was dispatched from Spain. Nonetheless, Balboa set sail in 1513 and Francisco Pizarro was among those with him. After a march through thick jungles, the expedition spotted the Pacific Ocean. His explorations of the area restored him to favor with the crown but he still had Pedro Dávila, who was now commanding control of Darién, to deal with.

Pizarro

Following his exploits with Balboa, Pizarro was appointed governor of new Panamá in 1519. By this time Córtez had acquired quite a reputation in Santiago, the new capital of Cuba where he had been appointed mayor and, with the tentative support of Governor Velazquez, he made haste in setting sail on an expedition to present-day Mexico. The six ships and 300 men he had managed to acquire by personality alone had increased to 11 ships and 600 men when he arrived on the coast of the Yucatán later in the year. In the interim, Balboa's fortunes had taken a turn for the worse as his rivalry with Dávila grew more heated. Balboa had managed to convince the elder to support a new foray into the South Sea and had departed. But the incessant infighting and backstabbing between the two had Pedro Dávila fearing that he would be removed from his post as a result of Balboa's claims against him. He called the latter back from his expedition and, following a trial by fire, promptly had Balboa beheaded.

Having landed on the coast of Mexico and burned his ships in an obvious gesture, Córtez and his men were making haste inland, encountering Indians along the way, many of whom proved less than hospitable. When he arrived in the capital of Tenochtitlán with his small force, the Aztec Emperor Montezuma was undermined by his own belief that Córtez was the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl reincarnated. With support from the Tlaxcala Indians, a tribe that had been fiercely opposed to Montezuma's rule, Córtez was able to subdue the capital of Tenochtitlán. His hold on the lands was tentative, however, and the Spanish Crown had grown restless during the period. They dispatched Pánfilo Narváez to relieve Córtez, but the latter met and defeated his would-be successor, only to return to Tenochtitlán to find it once again in control of the Aztecs. It wasn't until 1521 that Córtez had insured the fall of the Aztec Empire.

Two years later in 1523, Pizarro, who had learned of Peru from Bilbao, had partnered with **Diego de Almegro** and a Spanish priest and within a year they were off exploring the Colombian coast. After two long expeditions, Pizarro returned to Sevilla in Spain with enticing reports of the land in South America, whereupon he gained permission from the Emperor Carlos V to embark upon its conquest with the status of governor of this new province.

At the same time, Córtez was in Sevilla pleading his case to the crown. Mexico was in anarchy, a dispatch had been sent to inquire as to Córtez' activities and resulted in the mysterious death of Ponce de Léon (for which Córtez was blamed) and his own ill-fated expeditions into Honduras only made matters worse.

Pizarro set sail in 1530 with an army numbering less than 200, mostly Extremadurans (among them his four brothers) and made quick work of the newly discovered lands, dispatching an army of over 30,000 Incans in Cajamarca, where the Incan Emperor Atahualpa was taken prisoner, before capturing the capital of Cuzco without a struggle. Though Atahualpa's people had kept their promise to fill the jailed Emperor's confines with riches in

order to gain his release, Atahualpa was soon cited for treason and, in 1533, strangled to death.

His conquest outwardly complete, Pizarro spent the rest of his life trying in vain to maintain control over his rich empire in Peru. Conflicts arose on numerous fronts, with the Incans in constant revolt and Spanish soldiers dismayed because they hadn't received their rightful share of riches and power. Pizarro was ultimately murdered in Lima, Peru by a contingent of soldiers faithful to Almegro, Pizarro's former partner who had been executed at his request. Córtez, who had returned to Spain from Mexico in 1540 and was making plans to return, died before he could do so.

Lest we forget the other notables whose names are not Pizarro, Balboa or Cortez; there was the **Fray Jerónimo de Loaísa** of Trujillo, who served as the first bishop of Cartagena de Indias in what is now northern Colombia. **Nuflo de Chaves**, also of Trujillo, was credited with the discovery of Bolivia and **Francisco de Orellana** participated with Pizarro in the conquest of Peru before heading the expedition that discovered the Amazon River. **Pedro Valdivia** of Villanueva de la Serena founded Nueva Extremadura in present-day Chile and, from Badajoz, **Pedro Alvarado** went on to conquer Guatemala and El Salvador.

Cáceres

> *"... the word of Allah: people need not fear the unknown if they are capable of achieving what they need and want."* Paul Coelho*, The Alchemist*

We start in the northern half of Extremadura with its shifting terrain – cool valleys and modest peaks, plains, rivers and swimming holes, pockets of thick forest interrupted by empty fields that are dusty, gray and brown. It is a surprising feast for the eyes of any traveler who has previously caved to the fallacy that Extremadura is little more than a badlands, bleak and desolate. A web of rivers headed by the Tajo (Tagus) crisscrosses the central plain of slate and granite known as the Llanos de Cáceres. Save for the riverbanks, this land is generally sparse and unsettling, though not so completely void of interest. It boasts the region's largest city of Cáceres, neighboring Trujillo fortified on a hill in the plain, the famous pilgrimage site at Guadalupe and, of course, museums and ancient attractions off the beaten path.

Small mountain ranges boost the periphery, surrounding plains and unfenced rangeland, rising here and there as the Sierra de Gata or San Pedro. Rich valleys in-between are dotted with villages, of which La Vera must be mentioned for its uniform homes, crude but practical on this frontier land, and its notoriety as the final residence of the Emperor Carlos V (Carlos I in Spain). Farther south, nature is preserved in Monfragüe Natural Park, with its prolific collection of feathery friends. To the west the region shares with its neighbor Portugal a confluence of river gorges, while to the north is Salamanca province, to the east Ávila and Toledo. Here and there are vestiges of various cultures, ranging from the Stone-Age dolmens near Valencia de Alcántara to the contemporary high-rise apartments of Cáceres that unceremoniously and most unfortunately conceal a marvelous medieval city like a cheap dust-cover tossed over a priceless Degas.

Steps flanked by two towers lead from the oblong and rather incongruous 16th-century arcaded Plaza Mayor of Cáceres into this nether-world. It is a closely confined and harmonious assemblage of medieval palaces, mansions, churches and convents constructed of orange-tinted quarried stone. Narrow cobblestone thoroughfares wind between these monuments, and an immense Roman-era wall surrounds them. White storks flutter and clatter about their large nests on rooftops, on signs, in nooks and crannies at every turn. Owing to its torrid heritage of invasion and warring factions, defense was no doubt an utmost concern when architects set to the task of recreating this town following its recapture from the Moors, for windows are scarce, buildings are tight and its location, seated on a readily defensible hill overlooking an immense sprawl of flat land, could not have been more cautiously chosen.

Below the stone, and the tourist's feet, are the remains of an ancient Celtiberian settlement, over which the Romans began to create their city of Norba Caesariana in 25 BC, only to have it largely destroyed by the invading Visigoths years later. But then the Moors arrived, and with them the splendor of the city they called al-Cazires was restored. A period ensued during which claim to Cáceres, as well as many other strategic cities of the province, exchanged hands numerous times between the Muslims and the Christians. Christians under Alphonso IX of León once and for all secured Cáceres in 1229. The Moors, needless to say, were left in the proverbial mud. Though some remnants of their occupation are preserved in this old city, as with the Caza Mudéjar, Cáceres' architectural majesty derives from the 14th- to 16th-century Christian works.

■ Tourism Offices

Plaza Mayor 3, ☎ 92 721 19 20. A block away in the old city is another tourism office that organizes free tours of the city *(Palacio de Caravajal, ☎ 92 725 55 97)*.

■ Outdoor Companies

De Nuevo en Ruta *(C/ Doctor Fleming 19, ☎ 92 722 11 23, fax 92 721 00 20, denuevoenruta@yahoo.es)* organizes paragliding, canyoning, canoeing and rafting trips in the Ambroz and Jerte valleys in the north of the province (see Plasencia and The Northern Valleys, pages 189-90, for more information).

■ Getting Here & Around

By Train: Trains leave from the station on Avenida de Alemania *(☎ 927 23 50 61)*, just across the road from the bus station. They go to **Mérida** (five per day, one hour); **Palencia** en route to **Salamanca** (up to three per day, 1½ hours or five hours); **Madrid** (five per day, five hours); **Sevilla** (one per day, 4½ hours).

By Bus: The bus station *(Carretera Gijón-Sevilla, ☎ 927 23 25 50)* is a few kilometers south of the Plaza Mayor. From it you can catch a taxi, or the L-1 bus to get to the city center. Buses run to: **Trujillo**, **Mérida** and **Plasencia** (up to five each per day, one-1¼ hour); **Madrid** (up to five per day, 3¾ hours); **Salamanca** (up to six per day, 3½ hrs); **Sevilla** (three or four per day, four hours).

By Car: From Madrid by car, take the N-V to Trujillo, then catch the N-521 heading west, which connects it to Cáceres. From Salamanca, the N-630 heads due south, through Plasencia and the northern mountains before passing through Cáceres en route to Sevilla, from where the same road can be taken in the opposite direction, through Mérida and then on to Cáceres.

■ Sightseeing

Casco Antiguo (Ciudad Monumental)

"We do not find a permanent city here, but we search for the eternal one." Inscription found in the Ciudad Monumental

Once within the walls, the realities of the outside world fade away, replaced by thoughts of the past, the stories and histories that have survived within these walls. Over here perhaps sat a conquistador who fought alongside Cortéz; and there, maybe a tired shepard of the Middle Ages with only his flock and the clothes on his back. There are many Spanish sites to encourage fanciful notions, though few, on account of their ticket booths and torrential tourists, can provide the solitude necessary to truly sense their history. In this medieval town at dusk, though, shadows outnumber the tourists and, with no gates to ever close it for the night, one can keep on pretending.

Through Arco La Estrella is **Iglesia de Santa María**, a predominantly 16th-century construct of Romanesque and early Gothic styles, that greets visitors standing in the captivating plaza of the same name. Its plateresque sacristy door and its tediously carved cedar altarpiece are worth your attention, as are the three naves that harbor the remains of various influential citizens from the city's past. The "Cristo Negro" is worth a look in a side chapel. But be careful. Tradition has it that any who dare look at this figure of Christ will die. During Holy Week members of the Brotherhood wear white gloves and dawn hoods just to be safe as they carry the statue in procession.

Casa de Carvajal is a good first stop. In what was once a mansion built in the 15th and 16th centuries, subsequently destroyed by fire, and then rebuilt in the mid-1900s, is the provincial tourism office, where free tours of the old city can be arranged .

Palacio de Toledo-Moctezuma was built between the 16th and 17th centuries in the Renaissance style and can be located by the pale dome of the nearby brick tower (Torre de los Espaderos). It was once home to descendents of the conquistador Juan Cano de Saavedra, of Cortéz fame, who married the daughter of the last Aztec emperor, Montezuma II.

Palacio de los Golfines de Abajo, fronting the Plaza de San Jorge named after the patron saint of Cáceres, was home to the Catholic Monarchs when they came to visit the city. In suiting such royalty, its façade is reputed to be the grandest example of the ornate plateresque style found in Cáceres.

Casa de las Cigüeñas, formerly the home of Fray Nicolás de Ovando, first governor of La Isla Española in the Indies (today shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic), maintains the only tower not to have been felled by order of Isabel la Católica in what was a two-part gesture: to signify the successful Reconquest, and to stymie the infighting of the city's noble class.

Casa de las Veletas, built atop the foundations of a 12th-century Moorish fortress, takes its name from the pinnacles, or "veletas," crowning it, though

others prefer to call it the Casa de los Aljibes for practical reasons. Today it is home to **Museo de Cáceres** *(☎ 92 724 72 34, closed Mon. and mid-afternoon, entry 1.20€, free on Sun.)*. The surviving 12th-century Moorish cistern, or *aljibe*, in the basement is believed to be one of only two of its kind remaining in the world. The museum space is mostly devoted to the province, with areas displaying traditional relics including handicrafts, archaeological remains, as well as a small collection of works by the likes of Picasso, Miró and El Greco.

Bottle Stoppers

While traveling in Extremadura, don't be appalled if you see trees that appear to have been savagely stripped of their bark and left naked and bright orange to die in the noon-day sun. These are the cork oak trees common to the Mediterranean and particularly Extremadura and they are not, in fact, dying (though they will within 150 years or so). The cork oak is unique in that it has an inner bark that regenerates an outer bark (the cork), over the course of a few years if harvested regularly. This waiting game explains why the rows of orange tree trunks gradually give way to brown trunks and then gray trunks as you pass by in the car or bus; the latter are about due for another harvesting. The process of removing the cork is still done by hand, with care taken not to harm the productive inner bark. Vertical slits are made, the cork is pried loose with special gadgets, and later it is steamed to soften it and smoothed of any rough edges. Then it most likely makes its way to the wineries.

■ Where to Stay

The **Parador de Cáceres** *(C/ Ancha 6, ☎ 92 721 17 59, caceres@parador.es, d 109-116€, w/ breakfast 127-124€)* occupies the former Palacio de Torreoraz, a 14th-century Gothic affair built for Diego Garcia de Ulloa, a knight of the Order of Santiago. As with the rest of Spain's charming *paradores*, one can't go wrong in booking a stay here. Dark hardwood floors give way to stone and intricate tile, and each room is unique and complete with the essential amenities, done up in earth tones with light fabrics that lend an air of casualness to the stolid confines. A courtyard breathes life into the old place. One would be hard-pressed to find something negative to report – staff are considerate and energetic, the stay feels truly authentic. Its great restaurant, the **Torreorgaz** *($$$, ☎ 92 721 17 59)*, serves regional Extremaduran dishes such as *sopa de perdiz* (partridge soup) and *cabrito asado* (roast kid) and has over 300 wines in its *bodega*.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Don Carlos *(C/ Donoso Cortés 15, ☎ 92 722 55 27, www.hoteldoncarloscaceres.net, d 80€)* is a recently inaugurated hotel a few blocks from the Plaza Mayor with a revamped medieval charm (the building, however, dates only to 1803). The original rock walls are exposed in places where plaster has been made to look as if it fell away a hundred years ago, arched windows are lovely with stained glass, swirling iron grill-work garnishes railings and window seals and pleasing sun-baked tile like that of Saltillo covers the floors of its rooms and public spaces. The sleeping quarters are uniform and simple, colored in peach, as is the building's exterior façade, and equipped with new bathrooms, television and DSL Internet connections.

DON'T SLAM THAT DOOR

For whatever reason, Spaniards have a particular aversion (and a finely tuned ear) to loudly shut doors. Do so, and you'll hear complaints from taxi drivers, hostel managers, even strangers on the street may cast a disapproving eye. While we're on the subject of Spanish pet-peeves, mind that you never prop your feet up on an empty chair or bench. Doing so will draw the same response. As for sandals....

Budget

Pensión Marquez *(C/ Gabriel y Galán 2, ☎ 92 724 49 60, d 20-25€ with exterior bathrooms)* has little more to commend it than a friendly lady working reception who seems to spend the rest of her days watching television next door with her daughters. There are also two sparse rooms with balconies looking out onto the Plaza Mayor that might be requested, though the weekend street sounds will have to be endured.

Hostal Alameda *(Plaza Mayor 33; ☎ 92 721 12 62, d 40€ with bath)* is a pleasant upper-tier hostel with views across the Plaza Mayor of the old cityscape. Rooms have been tastefully decorated, each with a different shape and look. If you don't like the feel of the modern yellow room, ask to see the Victorian one with red-flowery prints or perhaps another. All of the rooms have television and private bath.

■ What to Eat & Where

Extremaduran fare is simple and unpresumptuous like the people who cook it. To the peasants we owe such dishes as *migas* (pieces of fried bread flavored with bacon and peppers), the *conejo a la Inquisición* (sautéed rabbit grilled, then fried) and plenty of soups spiced with red pepper and cumin. To combat the hot months there are a variety of cold gazpacho soup variations (*-de juevos* is with fried eggs; *-de conejo* is with rabbit). The *cachoreña*, a mash of fried egg, bread, garlic and coriander is another typical cold dish.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Spain's most beloved pigs range on pasturelands in the southeast of the province, scouring for fallen acorns from the holm oak tree, only to be hung from the same trees some time in the future. The conditions make for the most delectable ham in Spain (as well as the most expensive), the *jamón iberico* and its most preferred variation, the *jamón de bellota*, immediately recognizable hanging in *bodegas* and *carnicerías* for its black hooves. True pork lovers will want to visit Jerez de los Caballeros during the second week of May when the **Salón del Jamón** is underway, a ham trade fair showcasing the prepared pig in all its various forms and flavors.

Another common livestock animal is the merino sheep, so happily suited to the harsh landscape that Extremadura claims half of the country's sheep population. It also produces a creamy white cheese, the *torta* of La Serena, which has a hint of pepper taste and leaves oil stains on your clothes if not handled carefully. Lamb dishes (*cordero*) are paramount – including the *cochofro*, a suckling lamb with egg and a host of stews – along with roast kid (*cabrito).*

The greatest culinary creation to have come out of the Extremaduran kitchen is the partridge *Alcántara*, so good that when the French discovered it centuries ago they hustled the recipe back to their own country. In this dish, the partridge is stuffed with foie gras and truffles then marinated in Port wine for two days before it is fried in pork lard, doused in gravy and garnished.

The men at the helm of **Atrio** *($$$$, C/ Avda. De España 30, ☎ 92 724 29 28)*, José Antonio Polo and Toño Pérez, are two leading pioneers of Extremadura's fledgling haute cuisine. When I inquired about the restaurant from a local, he promptly shook his hand in the limp-wristed, swinging pendulum fashion that is typical of Spaniards and indicates that something is expensive; then he added – as if to assuage my budgetary fears – that Atrio was the best restaurant in Extremadura. The restaurant is run as efficiently as a military academy but maintains the elegance and air of a Victorian ballroom. The chef's specialty dishes include the *panceta y chipirones encebollados,* which amounts to a delectable squid with bacon in a light potato cream sauce, and *trigueros con crema de patatas, trufa y oreja de ibérico,* a rare sirloin steak in potato cream sauce with truffles and topped with a pig's ear.

To reach **El Figón de Eustaquio** *($$, Plaza de San Juan 14, ☎ 92 724 43 62)*, follow Gran Vía out of the Plaza Mayor to the smaller Plaza de San Juan. There you will find one of Cáceres' most popular local establishments, revered for its wild game when in season and for its *migas extremeñas* all year round. This is a simple dish composed of day-old bread softened with salt water and paprika, then cooked to a golden brown with fried bacon and peppers. Prices are under 15€ for either the *menu de la casa* or the *menu regional* and, for a drink, the local *Ribera de Guadiana* wines are stocked here. Try a white claret or a red from the Tierra de los Barros, Extremadura's only classified wine-growing region.

For more regional food, try **El Gran Mesón** *(C/ General Ezponda 7, ☎ 92 721 46 12)* near the Plaza Mayor. The décor is decidedly *taurino*, or devoted to the bullfight, and the *sopa de tomate con higos* (tomato soup with figs) is a standard option on its three-course *menu del día*.

Excursions from Cáceres

Heading out west from Cáceres on the N-521, the road signs all point to the destination, Valencia de Alcántara. The route passes tracts of Mediterranean hearth and woodland, scattered strands of holm and cork oak that are so common in Extremadura, and occasionally a vulture casts its shadow from overhead while eyeing the fertile banks of the River Tagus just north of the road. Having arrived at the pueblo, a tour of the pre-historic dolmens is paramount. But first, a detour to Malpartida de Cáceres, 15 km (nine miles) outside of Cáceres, where the curious Museo Vostell Malpartida is situated amid the granite outcroppings of Los Barruecos, a protected natural area.

■ Malpartida de Cáceres & Los Barruecos

Sightseeing

Museo Vostell Malpartida is one of the more unusual museum experiences to be had in Spain. Outside the museum (actually the museum is both inside and outside) a Mig-21 fuselage stands over 100 feet high like a contemporary totem pole with old cars sandwiched at intervals all the way up. Another car is carved out of solid rock, blending in strangely with the granite boulders strewn all around the blue reservoir. Inside what was a former wool-washing complex transcendental acrylic paintings hang on walls, as do 20 motorcycles and other conceptual artworks, including half a human torso in polyester. Another car is surrounded by a wall of baguettes. The vanguard museum is the brain-child of the Spanish-German Wolf Vostell, a renowned contemporary artist of the post-war era who is credited with the technique known as dé-coll/age and who was an instigator of the video-art and Fluxus movements, the latter of which is characterized by nothing in particular except the whim of the artist. Upon discovering this strange natural landscape in the 1970s, Vostell declared it a "Work of Art of Nature." He then set about the task of manipulating the space as a showcase for his own work and that of other artists who were not only pushing the boundaries of art but subverting them altogether. *(Carretera de los Barruecos, s/n, Malpartida de Cáceres, ☎ 92 727 64 92, open in the spring 10 am-1:30 pm and 5-7:30 pm; summer 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 6-9 pm; fall 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-6:30 pm; entry fee 1.20€ or .60€ for students.)*

Los Barruecos Park is comprised of a string of reservoirs tied together and banked by *domos*, large piles of granite boulders that have been smoothed into every imaginable geometrical shape by erosion. It is easy enough to follow the trails through them and, while they may look small from a distance, once you're beneath them they are anything but. White storks have crowned many of the boulders with their nests and the endangered black stork utilizes the lakes during its summer migration route. In the winter, ducks crowd the waters and at night the green San Antonio frog can be heard croaking. In the spring the ground is colored with small white and yellow flowers, the laburnum and white escobas, as well as slips and flax, which in earlier times was manipulated to make linen yarn and linseed oil. The guards at the entrance to the park can pass on further information about trails and the area's flora and fauna. To explore Los Barruecos after a visit to the museum adjoin-

ing it, **Extremaruta, C.B.** *(Santa Ana 8, ☎ 92 727 67 82)* in Malpartida offers guided tours. There are also some rental bikes on hand.

■ Valencia de Alcántara

Valencia de Alcántara is off the beaten path, a small, simple village just a few kilometers inside the Portuguese border that sees more anthropologists and archeologists than tourists during any given year. Its modest *Barrio Gótico*, or Gothic neighborhood, appeals not because of any monumental tourist attractions, but because it can be enjoyed with only a handful of locals, some drifting casually around the dirt and cobblestone streets, others peeking out of windows curiously. There is not all that much to do except eat and, if you live here, try to work. Most of the humble buildings in the old quarter are whitewashed with sandstone accents; streets aren't all that clean and one wouldn't expect them to be, here in one of the poorest areas of Spain's poorest region. The town is rural, some might even say backward, but the people are friendly, if a little suspicious at first, and as salt-of-the-earth as one will come across in Spain.

It's a simple chore to see the sights: nearby is a crumbling castle that can be traced to the Moors and not far away a Roman aqueduct. But it is for the prehistoric relics that one comes to this distant enclave.

Seeing the Dolmens

The stone-age dolmens, some cut out of granite, others out of slate, were left behind eons ago during the Neolithic period. To the untrained eye, most look something like a mushroom, though many of their 'caps' have fallen off over the thousands of years since they were built. Most are composed of five or six base stones, pitched vertically in the scrub, with an entrance and another large slab forming a roof. They served as burial chambers in which the deceased were interred, either alone or in groups, along with any significant personal or spiritual belongings. Though these strange creations can be found as far away as Japan, they are most prevalent in Europe. All told, there are 48 dolmens scattered around the village of Valencia de Alcántara.

The tourism board has created a numbered system of routes by which all of the dolmens can be seen. In truth, one need only see a few to have seen them all unless the trip is for research purposes. The nearest grouping of dolmens can be reached on foot by departing the Plaza del Progreso on the Camino de la Buenavista. Two kilometers away you will encounter a cross and, to the right, a gate. Pass through it and follow the trail for another 100 m (328 feet) to the first dolmen; other trails lead off from here to the surrounding dolmens. The other sets of dolmens are best reached by car. Take the N-521 out of Valencia de Alcántara in the direction of Cáceres and make a right on the C-630 that leads to Badajoz. In two km (1.2 miles), take the rough road off to the right, pass through a gate and at the cross follow the adjoining road to a dirt circle, where the first of the dolmens is situated. These two routes will lead to just a few of the dolmens in the area. To acquire simple trail maps for all of them, go to the **Oficina Comarcal de Turismo** *(C/ Esteban López, ☎ 92 758 01 23)*, which keeps odd hours. If it is closed, try the *Ayuntamiento*, or courthouse, between 10 am and 2 pm or 5-8 pm. They usually keep a stock of backup tourist brochures on hand.

Where to Stay

For a truly rural experience, consider sleeping in one of the nearby *casas rurales*, many of which have been converted from old stone hunting cabins or livery stables.

Puerto Roque CR *(direction Puerto Roque, ☎ 92 758 41 71, info@puertoroque.com, d 75€; rooms for up to six, 150€)* is a short drive from Valencia de Alcántara with seven apartments of rough-hewn timber beams and rock fireplaces that comfort in an agrarian way. It is a beautiful setting among hills and granite crags that rise nearby, a pool lined with flagstones, and the sound of birds singing instead of *motos* or late-night revelers.

Also in Puerto Roque, ***Turismo Ecuestre Rural*** *(Restaurante El Cruce, ☎ 92 758 41 27) organizes* rutas a caballo *(horseback rides) in the nearby Sierra Fría. The staff at the* casa rural *can help arrange the trip, though a minimum of two people will be required to make it happen.*

■ Parque Natural de Monfragüe

"Good walking leaves no track behind." Geoffrey Oryema

This ambitious sanctuary lays claim to the world's sole surviving original Mediterranean forest and a rare *dehesa*, a precious native grassland shaded by stands of holm and cork oak, which has become increasingly uncommon in Spain as expanding agricultural practices exact their changes on the landscape. Though noteworthy attractions in and of themselves, their ecological value is compounded by the unique ensemble of vertebrate species they harbor, especially the birds. A hike up to the castle Monfragüe, or to the viewpoint at La Tejadilla, affords the opportunity to witness glimpses, however fleeting, of the greatest attractions in this park – the black vulture and imperial eagle – both endangered, and both more prevalent here than anywhere else in the world. In their nests atop holm and cork oak trees they are accompanied by the chipper bantering of colorful azure-winged magpies, bee-eaters, and black-winged kites.

With patience, there is more, much more to be seen. The Romans knew the area as Mons Fragorum, which means rough mountain. With the construction of the **Ermita de Monfragüe** (castle and hermitage of Monfragüe) under the Arabs, the park acquired its modern name. The structure, situated on top of the Sierra de las Corchuelas, overlooks the western expanse of the park and an ancient trade route across the River Tajo (Tagus).

The Tajo and Tjetar rivers are a frequent sight from the trails, meandering through valleys and past steep, rocky crags where, in places, the embattled black stork can be found nesting alongside an assortment of vultures, eagles and falcons. The reservoirs and tributaries sustain otters, the amphibious newts and salamanders, various migratory bird populations, red deer and boar (which hunters are permitted to shoot in certain seasons), mongoose, the Moorish gecko and snakes. A rare sight is the Iberian lynx, slowly suffering its decline as the rabbit populations grow scarce and human intervention more acute. To counter the devastation wrought on this enclave by dams, the ensuing loss of natural vegetation and the influx of non-native species such

as the eucalyptus tree, park officials are engaged in the long process of restoring the two natural habitats of the park.

Getting Here & Tourist Information

By Train: Despite its name, the nearest train station, Monfragüe, is not just a hop, skip and a jump away from the entrance gates. The best option is to catch a taxi from here, though this might take some time.

By Car: The EX 208/C-524 (from Trujillo go north; from Plasencia go south) leads to Vallarreal de San Carlos, where the park's visitor center is located *(☎ 92 719 91 34)*. This is a helpful and informative place to visit first, as it has a multimedia room and exhibition center devoted to the park's ecosystem. Maps and park information are also supplied here. Nearby Torrejón el Rubio also has a tourist office with information on the park *(C/ Madroño 1, ☎ 92 745 52 92)*.

Adventures on Foot

The trail to **Monfragüe Castle** extends roughly 15 km (nine miles) and can be reached from the huts below Villareal or, farther on, from the Puente del Cardenal. This 15th-century bridge made travel across the River Tajo possible and fostered a major trading route, to which bandits flocked until Carlos III founded Villareal de San Carlos as a military outpost to protect the travelers and merchants.

Cross this bridge and follow the reservoir around to the Fuente del Francés (fountain). A steep, winding footpath leads up the shady side of the mountain through Mediterranean forest to the castle and the hermitage. From it the surroundingss of the park can be surveyed with a watchful eye for any of the endangered flying predators (not that they're going to attack you). At the top, a marked trail leads down to the Salto del Gitano (Gypsy Waterfall), past prehistoric caves and rudimentary paintings of dancing stick-figures. The Gypsy Waterfall is the most promising spot to see one or more of the birds of prey and especially rewarding in the spring. From here you can connect back with the original trail via the reservoir bank. You'll pass by the fountains and then reach the Cardenal Bridge on the way back to Villareal.

Where to Stay

Accommodations are few and far between in the three localities adjoining the park.

The **Hospedería Park of Monfragüe** *(Ctra Plasencia-Trujillo, km 39, Torrejón el Rubio, reservations info@alextur.net, d 75-88€)* is the newest and best accommodation near the park, although not the cheapest. The three rectangular buildings are modernistic and of local slate and granite, situated on a rise overlooking the park. The Hosepedería is located on the EX 208 that links Trujillo and Plasencia, just a few kilometers south of the park in Torrejón el Rubio.

The recently renovated **Hotel Cañada Real** *(☎ 927 459 40, principal@hotelcreal.es, s 53-66 €, d 127-158 €)* in nearby Malpartida de Plasencia is another option with nicely appointed rooms and two suites decorated in pastels and outfitted with rustic, country furniture.

La Posada de Amonaria *(☎ 927 459 446, posada@amonaria.com, s 47 €, d 56-75€, suites 84 €)* offers a more traditional stay in an antique-laden village hotel where dance lessons and tours of the surrounding area can be arranged.

The **Hostal Monfragüe** *(Paseo de Pizarro 25, ☎ 92 745 50 26, d 25€)* in Torrejón el Rubio is the cheapest alternative around, outside of sleeping under the stars.

Though camping is not permitted in the park, **Camping Parque Natural de Monfragüe** *(☎ 927 459 233)* is relatively close-by on the C524 in Malpartida de Plasencia and has a few bungalows for rent if tent pitching isn't your gig. Capacity is 369 and costs per day for tents are 2.99€, cars 2.34€, campers 2.99€.

■ Plasencia

Plasencia on a Tuesday afternoon... the medieval market first initiated during the 12th century is well underway. The modest flow of shoppers and gawkers leads past Spaniards standing at the ready to make a sale, hawking products wearable or edible, used and new. "Some good, some bad," a Swedish friend says.

Plasencia is as monumental a city as you will find in northern Extremadura. Near the convergence of the three northern valleys, it is perfectly situated for outdoor excursions and an easy day-trip from Cáceres. King Alfonso VIII officially founded the city in 1186, though the area had been occupied in prehistoric times. Its name, bestowed by the King, means "pleasant for God and men." The town's defensive walls were under construction when the Moors arrived in 1186, and had they been completed, the city might have been spared its Moorish occupation. When King Alfonso VIII returned the city to the Christians a year later, he made sure that the walls were finished promptly. In many places they have been faithfully restored and two of the original gates still remain.

Sightseeing

When you reach the town, the **aqueduct** is immediately impressive. It was built in the mid-16th century to restore the water flow from the earlier *cañería de los moros* aqueduct (Moorish pipes). Inside the walls the town hall, or **Palacia Municipal**, built during the grey area as Gothic styling gave way to Renaissance, highlights the Plaza Mayor. For most, the square is recognized by its tower and bell, **El Abuelo Mayorga**, which rings every hour on the hour, alerting the townsfolk to wake up, eat, and sleep – as if these acts weren't already natural. But this is one of the greatest charms of Spain, that its historical sentimentalities are less dimmed by passing time than in many other countries.

Time should be spent visiting the two adjoining cathedrals of Plasencia that stand, despite their proximity, in stark contrast to one another. The **Catedral Vieja** (old cathedral) was first constructed in the 13th century and is modest in its Renaissance styling. Of note is the incomplete scene of the Annunciation of the Virgin inside and the Capilla de San Pablo (Saint Paul's Chapel) fronting the cloister around a Gothic fountain. The 16th-century **Catedral Nueva** next to it is more impressive architecturally, with tall, plateresque façades and a tower that once belonged to the old cathedral. The

grand high altar piece inside dates to the 17th century and holds a number of interesting paintings and sculptures, as well as the 13th-century wooden image of the Virgin of El Sagrario. Next to it is the sepulchre of Pedro Ponce de León, Benedictine monk and reliable advisor to Felipe II who is credited with having developed the first method of teaching deaf-mutes. The **Cathedral Museum** displays a collection of 15th- to 17th-century religious relics, as well as sculpture and paintings by Spanish and Flemish artists. Also in the collection are some archaeological remains discovered in the valleys, where you should head next.

Getting Here

By Train: The train station is next to the bus station *(☎ 90 224 02 02)*, with a couple of departures daily to Cáceres, Mérida and Madrid.

By Bus: The bus station is at the intersection of Avenida de Simón and Camino de Cementerio *(☎ 97 974 32 22)*, which can be reached by heading west from Plaza Mayor on Calle Mayor. Buses run daily to Salamanca and Cáceres (10 or more) and to Mérida and Sevilla (four-five).

By Car: From Salamanca by car, head south on the N-630; from Madrid take the N-V southwest and at Navalmoral de La Mata pick up the EX-108 to the east. This connects to the N-630, which should be taken north; from Cáceres drive north on the N-630.

Where to Stay

The newly opened **Parador de Plasencia** *(Plaza de San Vicente, s/n, ☎ 92 742 58 70, d 100-116€, plasencia@parador.es)* occupies the Gothic Convento de Santo Domingo, built by the wealthy Zuniga family in the 15th century. Expect a lot of cold stone masonry and echoing corridors. The natural lighting in the afternoon feels almost strong enough to give you a suntan. The restaurant recommends local dishes such as honey roast *cordero* (lamb) with vegetables, as well as partridge stews (*guisos de perdiz*) and sweet desserts with figs (*higos*). Main dishes cost upwards of 20€.

Hostal La Muralla *(C/ Berrozana 6, ☎ 92 741 38 74)* is located in the Casco Antiguo (ancient city), the tourist's focal point. Some of its 13 rooms have full bath (30€), while others have only a sink (25€) with the bathroom down the hall.

■ The Northern Valleys

The valleys of Ambroz, Jerte and La Vera stretch southward together from Extremadura's northern border with Salamanca. Each has its own characteristic landscape and wildlife, though they all share the color green and occasionally exceptional views of snow-capped peaks. Scattered among them are small villages – some at the base of terraced hills, others on the banks of rivers – that have, for the most part, been left to their own toil through the years. Local handicrafts are still prevalent and a boost to village economics. Poor rural farmers are sustained by the goats that will end up in *carnicerías* and restaurants across the region.

The Valle de Ambroz is the westernmost of the three and well known for its therapeutic waters and ancient oak and chestnut groves. Jerte is the central

valley that begins at the southwestern foothills of the Sierra de Gredos climbing into Salamanca. Its terrain is more rugged as it declines to the River Jerte running through the center. Gorges and waterfalls abound. La Vera is the easternmost valley and popularly recognized as the final residence of the Emperor Carlos V. Here you will find forests of oak and poplar trees, tobacco plants and chilies hung out to dry before they are turned into paprika.

Into the Valle del Jerte

From Palencia, head north up the N-110 as it follows the River Jerte most of the way to its source near Extremadura's northern border. This route cuts straight through the Valle del Jerte, with the Valle del Ambroz to the west and the Valle de La Vera to the east.

Adventures on Water

Just a few kilometers north of Palencia stop at the campground **La Chopera** *(C.N.-110-Valle del Jerte, 92 741 66 60, open Mar. 1-Sept. 30)*, base camp for the adventure sports company **Norextur** *(☎ 92 742 32 04)*. If you want to spend a few days charging the rapids, this is not a bad spot to pitch the tent. The river floats by the camp and, outside of the bungalows, sleeping digs only cost 3.10€ a night per person, plus another 3€ for a tent space and 2.80€ with a car. The campground has a post box, tennis courts and swimming pool as well as hot showers and all the necessary camper hook-ups. There is also a supermarket with a few dinky fishing rods for sale. Before baiting the hook, you'll want to check with the office about permits.

From here you can hitch up-water with Norextur and kayak down the River Jerte. Cost is 15€ for a half-day. Trips can be arranged here, or at their main office in Placencia, C/ Sol 16. They also guide hiking (9€) and rapelling trips (9€ half-day) through the valley and rent mountain bikes.

For most, the highlight of La Garganta de los Infiernos is **Los Pilones**, a string of circular depressions known as "the cooking pots," natural water holes that have been eroded by centuries of runoff from the bleached-white gorge that rises above them. They make for one of the best freshwater swims in Spain and only the trout seem to mind. The water is crystal clear and fresh and in the summer the pools will be crowded with sunbathers and swimmers floating and playing in the rush of waterfalls that connect them.

Besides Los Pilones, the park harbors a variety of habitats. In the lowest reaches, oak and cork are prevalent. These give way to non-native chestnuts, ash, holly and honeysuckle, among others. Bushes predominate in the higher realms of the park, along with heather and creeping junipers and these are soon replaced by pasturelands, known as *cervulanes* after the grass that covers them and feeds livestock. A number of birds of prey make their nests here, including peregrine falcons, royal eagles and tawny vultures. There are also eagle owls, woodpeckers, golden orioles, sparrow hawks, jays and a great many more. The main information office, the **Centro de Interpretación** at the park entrance near the village of Jerte is helpful and can fill you in on every single species you might stumble across in your walks through the park. There is another entrance and information center in Tornavacas, a few kilometers north of Jerte. The nearest **campground** in Jerte is called, appropriately, **Valle del Jerte** *(C.N.-110, km 367, ☎ 92 747 01 27, open Mar.-Sept.)*. A

parcel for a car and tent or car and caravan costs 6€. A person and a tent space cost 6€.

Adventures on Horseback

Continue north on the N-110 to **Cabezuela del Valle**, a riverside village notable for its old Jewish quarter "La Aldea" and its quaint, arcaded plaza. From here, we can branch off into the surrounding valleys, either by car or, in keeping with the destination, on horseback (but don't forget your bathing suit). **Picadero Los Pilones** *(El Puente 6, Cabezuela del Valle, ☎ 92 747 20 45)* will saddle up its horses for a guided foray through two of the most popular routes in the valleys, the route of the Emperor Carlos V (covered later) and the route to the **Parque Natural La Garganta de los Infiernos**. This trip costs 15€ per person and consists of a two-hour ride through oak and chestnut trees along winding mountain trails strewn with mountain goats. It ends with a splash in the park's natural lagoons, called Los Pilones. The Parque Natural La Garganta de los Infiernos can also be reached by car, though the lagoons are only accessible via a sign-posted foot trail. From Palencia the N-110 leads north and passes by the park 30 minutes later. Brown park signs mark the exit. From Hervas in the Ambrose Valley, take the N-360 east.

Into La Vera Valley

From La Garganta de los Infiernes, it is possible to pick up the **Route of Emperor Carlos V** (Carlos I in Spain) on your own and follow it to Jarandilla de La Vera on foot. To do it on horseback from Cabezuella del Valle to Jarandilla de La Vera it'll cost 45€ and take two days, with a stay-over in a *casa rural* along the way. On your own, start out from the village of Tornavacas at the northern end of the park – the path is well signposted all the way.

Carlos V, by Titian

Here Carlos V (-V as emperor of Germany; -I as king of Spain) stopped to rest in late 1556 en route to the monastery outside the village of Cuacos in what would amount to his last trip and his own personal exile. Once the most powerful leader in the world, by this time he had abdicated the throne to Felipe II and was a shade of his former self, constantly bothered by gout and with only a few years to go, which he intended to enjoy in leisure. He had controlled the Low Countries, much of Italy, France and northern Africa, had seen Spain's universities attain world preeminence, had amassed the greatest armada and army, all with the immense wealth that came from having conquered the New World. But ultimately he would leave Spain – where he had in fact spent very little time in during his reign as king from 1519 to 1555 – in the economic wastebasket.

Adventures on Foot

Leaving from the Santa Maria de Tornavacas hermitage, the trail stretches some 23 km (14 miles) and, though not difficult, will take up to 10 hours to complete. The route took the ailing king and his small entourage, overburdened with furniture, tapestries and paintings by his favorite artist Titian, a good two months. Follow the river in a gradual climb before reaching Collado de Las Losas and from there, down the trail to the Puente Nuevo (new bridge). In the springtime the hills will be brightly colored with blooming cherry trees. This is an excellent opportunity to experience the richly varied flora and fauna of La Garganta de los Infiernes (the Ravine of Fires) as you pass through it on a high ridge.

Soon you will leave the Jerte Valley and enter **La Vera**, passing through heavy oak forests along the way. From the bridge, climb to El Cero de Encinillas and head through the Puerto de Las Yeguas (pass), the highest point on the hike and with spectacular views of the surrounding valley and the Sierra de Gredos Mountains to the north. It was in this area that the Emperor is purported to have said, "I will not cross any pass again but that of death itself." In descent you will pass Garganta Yedron and Guijo de Santa Barbara before reaching the road that leads to Jarandilla.

The Emperor lived in the **Monasterio de Yuste** from 1557 until his death in 1558, after which his remains were transferred by his son Felipe II to El Escorial near Madrid. Today Hieronymite monks occupy the monastery and only his royal chambers and the chapel, with a pleasing 15th-century Gothic cloister and walnut choir stalls in the Renaissance style, are open to tourists. Take note of the Emperor's easy chair. He had a penchant for spicy German foods and heavy beers that would incessantly inflame his gout. Here he would retire for hours on end to endure the pain. The monastery is open generally from 9:30 am-11:30 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm.

Where to Stay

The **Parador de Jarandilla** *(Avda García Prieto 1, ☎ 92 756 01 17, d 94-110€)* occupies the Castillo de los Condes de Oropesa, the castle in which the Emperor lived for five months while construction was being completed on his palace next to the Monastery of Yuste.

Camping Carlos I *(Avda del Ceralejo, s/n, ☎ 92 717 20 92, open Mar. 15-Sept. 15)* in Cuacos de Yuste has a capacity of 267 people with a restaurant and supermarket. There are no bungalows for rent, so bring a caravan or a tent. Each will cost 3€ per night, plus another 3€ per person.

Into the Ambroz Valley

On return to Cabezuela del Valle, take the N-360 west to reach the Baños de Montemayor. You'll pass through the beautiful snowy mountain pass of Puerto de Honduras and the town of **Hervás.** Here the old Jewish quarter, a packed neighborhood of three-story brick homes with pitched tile roofs, has been declared an Archaeological Conservation Area. The Palacio de los Dávila is an 18th-century Baroque mansion now home to the **Museo de Pérez Comendador-Leroux** and the **Museo de Motocicletas Classicas**. Admission is free to both, with the former housing the sculptural works of Enrique Pérez Comendador and the pictorial works of his French wife,

Magdalena Leroux. The latter houses a large collection of classic motorcycles.

Adventures on Foot

Midway between Hervás and Baños, the **Ambrose Forest hiking trail** can be picked up from the road. This is a long hike (roughly 35 km/22 miles) and above average in difficulty, leading from the hermitage of La Garganta to Segura de Toro. The hike, according to a faded tourist brochure, passes by "ancient oak trees and towering pines, around natural swimming holes and over Roman bridges with great views of the snow-capped peaks and the Ambrose valley below." Due to its elevation and its length, it is best to check with the tourist office in Hervás for current conditions and a detailed map of the trail (I was advised against it in the winter). The office is on C/ Braulio Navas 6, ☎ 92 747 36 18.

Adventures on Water

The village of **Baños de Montemayor** is on a historical Roman route that connected Astorga in the north with then capital Mérida in Extremadura. Here travelers would stop to bathe in the natural hot springs, believed to have therapeutic properties. Today the baths are still functional but retain little of their original appearance. Still, the village is in a beautiful valley setting, with hills rising around it and hand-woven wicker baskets lining the walls and the streets. The modern health spa includes the antique *balneario* (ancient spa) and the *nuevos balnearios* (new spas), both sets of which have been completely renovated and, in the case of the latter, look no more charming than a west Texas swimming pool. This soothing adventure doesn't come cheap. To hang in the thermal baths for a day it will cost around 100€. For a full weekend treatment that includes a doctor's consultation, peels, breathing hot air and massages, the price pushes upwards of 200€. Still, it's cheaper than LA.

Heading Home

From Baños, you can backtrack on the N-310 and then pick up the N-110 to return to Plasencia, or continue south on the N-630, what was the old Silver Route, and discover your own favorite villages on the way back to Plasencia.

Trujillo

> *"Not many years ago there issued from a town in Estremadura a hidalgo nobly born, who, like another prodigal son, went about various parts of Spain, Italy, and Flanders, squandering his years and his wealth."* Miguel Cervantes, *The Jealous Extremaduran*

There is a Trujillo in Mexico, another in Honduras, another in Peru and others, all named by the Spaniards who came from the original one in Spain to conquer those lands. Trujillo, perhaps the most enchanting town in Extremadura, is proud of its heritage as the birthplace of Pizarro and a slew of other tough-spirited individuals who made their names and fortunes in the New World.

■ Tourism Office

Located in the Plaza Mayor *(☎ 92 732 26 77)*.

■ Adventure Company

Gárgola Servicios Turísticos *(Plaza Mayor 17, ☎ 92 732 32 25, turismo@gargola.nu)* offers guided tours devoted to flora, fauna and cultural monuments in the area. They will hitch up the horses to the carriage or take you hot-air ballooning (90€ per hour), ultra-light or horseback riding (9€ per hour).

■ Getting Here

By Bus: The bus station *(☎ 92 732 95 99)* is on Avenida Miajadas, a short walk south of the Plaza Mayor. Buses run to: **Cáceres** (five-six per day, 45 minutes); **Madrid** (up to 14 per day, 2½ hours); **Mérida** (up to five per day; 1½ hours).

By Car: From **Madrid** take the N-V southeast and from **Mérida** the same highway north. From **Cáceres** the 521 is a straight shot east.

■ Sightseeing

Atop the granite hill around which the town is situated is the nameless **castle**, built sometime in the 10th century by the Arabs and later expanded upon by the Christians after they'd taken over in 1232. The castle is striking in its simplicity. It is large but largely unornamented so that it is obvious, even to the casual tourist, that the lands of Extremadura were once a hotly contested frontier, a battleground in which the Moors came up from the south to meet the Christians descending from the north. Military function and practicality took precedence, a common feature of the Extremaduran landscape. For 1.50€ you can climb around the castle, slip quietly into the sanctuary dedicated to the patron of Trujillo, La Virgen de la Victoria, peek through the crenels of its battlement or follow the steps up to one of the towers, from which the eye can see out over Trujillo and the flat scrubland stretching far beyond.

To climb to the top of the town, you'll want to start in the Plaza Mayor, a misshapen "square" that doubles as the center of activity in the city and as its largest parking lot. Somehow, the latter does little to detract from the plaza's charm. Steps lead off in discordant angles and once served as bleachers when the plaza was walled off for bullfights.

A circular fountain occupies the center while a columned arcade wraps around the perimeter in places, creating shade that the commanding bronze statue in the middle of the plaza will never enjoy. It is the **Estatuo de Francisco Pizarro**, conqueror of Peru and Trujillo's favorite son; the conquista-

dor is on horseback and decked out in full armored regalia, looking every bit the part of a man capable of conquering a whole country with an army numbering only a few hundred. The statue was created by the North American Carlos Rumsey and encourages a rumor that the sculpture actually is a depiction of Hernan Cortez that was intended as a gift to the Mexican government. Whether this is true or legend, whether the Mexican government actually refused the gift and left Rumsey with little choice but to pawn it off on Trujillo as Pizarro, remains to be seen. If this were the case though, Rumsey could just as easily have located the statue in Medellín just a short ways south and birthplace of Cortez, and thus avoided the trickery altogether (though they now have their own statue). One thing is for certain – an exact replica of the statue can be found in Lima, Peru, where Pizarro spent his last years.

In the generations to follow, Pizarro's family lived in what is now the **Casa-Museo de Pizarro**, a home the conquistador likely only visited a few times without ever having lived there. Too see how the noble class might have lived in the 15th century, or to learn about the conquest of Peru that was occurring at the same time, stop in on the way up or down from the castle.

The **Palacio de los Marqueses de la Conquista** is another of the few sights in Trujillo that appear to have benefited from the immense wealth that flooded into Spain from the New World and just as quickly filtered away to other countries, leaving Spain with much less to show for her efforts than one might expect. It was the palace of Hernando Pizarro, Francisco's half-brother and only legitimate son of their father, Gonzalo Pizarro. Fernando was notoriously resilient. Where his brothers all met untimely, and often gruesome, deaths in the wilds of the New World, he survived to return to Trujillo loaded with wealth and built this home for his family. He also brought with him Francisco's daughter, his niece, whom he had married. Subsequent generations of his family would successfully petition to inherit the title first bestowed upon the conquistador, thus the lovingly convoluted family tree is realized in the huge shield of the palace.

Just across from this palace is the **Palacio de Juan Pizarro de Orellana**, former home of the Trujillano credited with the discovery of the Amazon. The iron chain across the front signifies that Emperor Carlos V had granted the conquistador's family, of which he was reportedly fond, immunity from taxes. Thus an already wealthy family got even wealthier while the vast majority of Extremadurans remained poverty-stricken, a pattern that is only now starting to unravel itself.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

Trujillo's **Parador** *($$-$$$, Santa Beatriz de Silva 1, ☎ 92 732 13 50, Trujillo@parador.es, d 94€, w/ breakfast 112€)* occupies what was once the Santa Clara Monastery, founded in 1533, in the plaza of the same name. A Renaissance cluster contains the 48 rooms, which are austere as tradition would have them be, but still cozy. Some rooms are better than others; #13 has an antique tiled staircase that leads up to a former cluster niche, still with its original door. Others have covered terraces with perfect views of the old city. The bar downstairs takes the place of what was the refectory, and the **Restaurante del Parador**, $$$, serves typical Extremaduran dishes of Iberian hams, roasts and peasant soups.

The **Hostal-Mesón Hueso** *(C/ Arquillo 4, ☎ 92 732 28 20, reserva@hostalhueso.com, d 25€)* has nine small and simply furnished rooms. They are not, however, run down, dirty or even uncomfortable, as you might assume when the word "simple" is used in the same sentence as "hostel." All have bathrooms, cable television and even private telephones (which never work with calling cards). The **Mesón** $ part of it, the traditional tavern, does a lot of spit-roasting. To get to the hostel, follow C/ Carnicería and make a right on C/ Arquillo.

Hostal Julio *(Plaza del Campillo 3, ☎ 92 732 19 63, d 35€)* has more rooms with modern décor and all the basic amenities to get clean, veg-out, or have a bite to eat downstairs, where *migas* (a hearty dish of day-old bread soaked in water, then fried) and *cordero* (roast lamb) are the standard offerings.

Restaurante Pizarro *($$, Plaza Mayor 13, ☎ 92 732 02 55)* has a name and location that attracts loads of tourists during the season. It has been around a lot longer than the tour buses, though, serving its specialty *gallino trufada* (hen stuffed with truffles) and, for all you vegetable lovers out there, a delicious tomato soup with figs and grapes. Opt for the *menu a la carta* (pick and choose) rather than the *menu del día*, which caters to the tourist crowd with inauthentic choices like spaghetti.

Guadalupe

> *"The real joy of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."* Marcel Proust

The winding road leads through the tangled valley of Las Villuercas, past olive groves and chestnut and over an infamous river, before it dead-ends on a hill. Even today, with paved ways and any number of transportation choices by which to arrive at Guadalupe, the sight seems distant and out of the way, just as it was for generations of pilgrims before. Yet news of the small, glowing figure in the monastery has filtered out of this secluded village for centuries. **Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe**, looking as delicate and sedate as a Chinese porcelain doll atop her pedestal, played a grand role in shaping faith in the Western world.

The old plaza in Guadalupe is dominated by the monastery of Saint Mary. Around it, white, two-story houses with red-tile roofs and ground-floor porticoes crowd narrow, winding medieval streets that trail off from the plaza at random angles. Planted ivies droop through the iron and wood railings of balconies. Local pottery, brasses and wicker hang from the whitewashed and ashlar walls. Follow the trails out of the village and it is all woods and crickets chirping, with a hill rising around behind the monastery. The setting is tranquil and no one seems to be in a hurry, especially the waiters in the plaza where Columbus once baptized two Indians. Their restaurants permeate the air with baking dishes of lamb and *cabrito,* while foreign tourists share the plaza tables with Spanish tourists.

■ Getting Here

By Bus: While it's no easy chore to get here by bus, at least one bus runs from Cáceres through Trujillo to Guadalupe and returns during the day. The bus station – well, there really isn't one. Buses stop

at the bottom of the hill across from the *Ayuntamiento* (town hall) and depart from there. Two buses a day run to **Madrid** and **Mérida**.

By Car: By far the easier alternative is by car; from Cáceres take the N-521 east to Trujillo. From there, follow the signs southeast to Zorita and then pick up the EX-102 heading east to Guadalupe. From Mérida, take the N-V or E-90 northeast until the EX-102 merges east from it and follow this road all the way to Guadalupe. From Madrid, take the N-V southwest to Talavera de la Reina, and there head south on the 502. At La Nava de Ricomolilla turn east for Guadalupe.

■ Tourist Information

Information can be picked up at the tourism office *(☎ 92 715 41 28)*, located on the plaza and open 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm and on weekends during the mornings until noon.

■ Sightseeing

Having visited the shrine at Guadalupe in 1337, Alfonso XI returned in 1340 to found a monastery here. The **Real Monasterio de Santa María de Guadalupe** *(open 9 am-1 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm)* grew out of the small hermitage that housed the icon of the Virgin following its rediscovery in the 14th century on the banks of the nearby River Guadalupe. The Hieronymite Friars (Hermit Order of St. Jerome) were charged with the responsibility of maintaining this holy shrine and saw to it that the monastery was gradually expanded up until the 18th century. Pilgrims who arrived were allowed to stay free for up to three days and, before setting off on their return, were blessed with a new pair of walking shoes. The friars were skillful craftsmen whose iron and silver work is still apparent, yet the monastery fell into disrepair and was abandoned after the secularization of the monasteries in 1835. In the early 20th century the Franciscans took over the monastery and set to the task of restoring it.

The Shepherd's Discovery

While searching for a stray sheep along the banks of the Guadalupe River in 1325, Gil Cordero stumbled across an object protruding from the ground. It looked curiously out of place and so he retrieved it and, having wiped the dirt away, realized it was a statue of the Virgin. When word spread of the shepherd's discovery, the devout were soon making long pilgrimages to the sight of the hermitage where it was being kept, for this was the last work of St. Luke the Evangelist and it depicted the Virgin as she had posed on the Greek Island of Patmos not long before her death.

This was the same statue that had previously been carried through the streets of Rome in a successful attempt to rid the city of plague. Soon it had found its way to Sevilla but, with the Moors controlling most of the country, a group of devout followers wisely buried the virgin in this rural location sometime in 714 AD in order to keep it out of their hands. For six hundred years she remained buried, but her fame was anything but concealed. With her discovery, riches arrived at the small hermitage in Guadalupe from all over the

world. Tradition has it that the Friars, who benefited tremendously from the immense wealth of the monastery, took their meals on plates of solid gold.

The Virgin is believed to have played a key role in numerous victories over the Moorish invaders and in 1531 in Mexico an apparition of the Virgin is said to have appeared before a converted Indian named Juan Diego and ordered that a church be built on the sight. The incident was taken to heart and proved crucial to the Spanish attempt to baptize the Indians. Soon Mexicans were making their own pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was declared by papal bull in 1754 as the patron saint of New Spain.

The monastery's Gothic façade, left, with its handsomely carved roses and Mudéjar arches, is sandwiched between two brick towers, one rising higher than the other with battlements and the city's main clock. Steps lead into the monastery, with its three naves. The sight of the Virgin in the *retablo* is immediately striking. She is displayed on a Baroque high altarpiece, the tabernacle of which had formerly been King Felipe II's writing case. Her face is darkened by the years spent underground, but she is elegant nonetheless in her flowing, jeweled gown, with a scepter in one hand and a small statue of Jesus hidden in the other.

Here Columbus met Ferdinand and Isabel and received the grant that would send him on his way to the New World.

The monastery surrounds a large Mudéjar cloister with two levels of arcades framed by arches and a 15th-century pavilion in the center. On the walls of the cloister is a collection of paintings depicting the various miracles for which the Virgin was responsible. Just off it is the former refectory, now the **Museo de los Borbados** (Embroidery Museum), which displays altar clothes, ecclesiastical gowns and other pieces made in the monastery. Nearby is the old Chapter House, home to the **Museo de Miniados**, with one of the world's greatest collection of 14th- to 18th-century choir books, all beautifully illustrated and brightly colored. The **Museo de Esculturas y Pinturas** houses sculptures and paintings by Juan de Flandes, Goya and Extremadura's own, Francisco de Zurbaron, whose paintings in the sacristy dedicated to the Hieronymite Friars are perhaps the highlight of the monastery's art works. In the 17th-century side chapel, known as the Camarín of the Virgin, the beautiful icon can be seen spinning on a pedestal, the huge canvases of Luca Giordano can be admired, as well as the Baroque sculptures known as the "Ocho Mujeres Fuertes," depicting the eight strong women of the Old Testament.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

Hospedería del Real Monasteria *(Plaza Juan Carlos I, ☎ 92 736 70 00, d 48€)* claims a part of the monastery established under the direction of the Heironymite friars during the 15th century and still occupied today by the Franciscan monks. The rooms are situated around a beautiful Gothic cloister and look basically as they did when the friars occupied them, long and narrow with high ceilings and small doors. Though modern amenities have been added, the rooms are still a righteous bargain. The restaurant is known for its *migas* (fried bread casseroles), *bacalao de Felipe II* (a rich codfish casserole) and sweet *biscuit de higos* (a fig delight).

The **Parador de Guadalupe** *(C/ Marqués de la Romana 12, ☎ 92 736 70 75, guadalupe@parador.es, d 76-82€)* was the pilgrim hospital of San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist) during the 16th century. Now it is just another one of Spain's most splendid places to spend the night. The patio is full of orange trees and the rooms surround a cloister with birds singing and flitting everywhere (when the canopy isn't closed for shade in the summer). There is vegetation all around and a shaded swimming pool that even a cat could enjoy. The annex may feel less authentic than the original structure, but it is all the more comfortable and is preferable for its modernized rooms and terrific views of the monastery and the Sierra de Villuercas.

Hostal Alfonso XI *(C/ Alfonso Onceno 21, ☎ 92 715 41 84, d 35-40€)* was once a popular hunting lodge and the rooms, not coincidentally, have a rustic, wild character about them. To sleep right next to the monastery, try the **Hostal Cerezo II** *(Plaza de Santa María de Guadalupe 33, ☎ 92 715 41 77, d 35€ with bath)*. Some of the interior rooms feel shut in, but a handful have windows with beautiful views of the surrounding area. Both Alfonso and Cerezo have restaurants that serve Extremaduran cuisine and offer a *menu del día* for around 10€.

Mesón el Cordero *($-$$, C/ Alfonso Onceno 27, ☎ 92 736 71 31)* is a moderately priced establishment popular with the locals. *Guisos* (stews) and *perdiz estofado* (stuffed partridge) are some of the things you'll see them ordering. And the flan, oh the delicious, homemade flan....

Camping

Las Villuercas-Guadalupe *(Carretera Villanueva-Huerta del Río, 2 km, Guadalupe, ☎ 92 736 71 39)* is a small campground a few kilometers away from Guadalupe on the C-401. It is open all year, with no restaurant but a little supermarket. There's no swimming pool, but a river instead. If you're trigger-happy, pick up a huntin' permit. Tent spaces will set you back 2.25€ (plus the $150 you paid at REI). Adults are charged 2.25€ apiece and cars a few cents less. Like many of the campgrounds, it offers *senderismo* (hiking), which usually means, "Here's a map. There's the direction. Off you go."

■ Adventures on Wheels

NatRural *(C/ Gregorio López, 17, Guadalupe, ☎ 92 715 42 24)* offers **4x4 tours** in the valleys around Guadalupe. To reach their headquarters from the Plaza Mayor, take C/ Gregorio López leading directly away from the façade of the monastery. The three-hour

4x4 trips cost 18€ and can be caught each morning and afternoon, though if your group is less than four you'll have to wait until some others sign on. Don't expect fish-tailing, mud-slinging four-wheeling rides through the wilds of Extremadura. The driving guides place a premium on respect of the natural and historical monuments visited during their tours – the SUVs are simply the best means of reaching them.

There are a number of different trips to choose from. One leads through the Mil Valles, before the SUV is left behind and a 40-minute hike is made through the Mediterranean forest in La Cabecera del Valle del Río Guadalupe, past a water mine known as the Arca del Agua and later an artesian well. Another trip merges an introduction to the region's gastronomy, from the stripping of cork trees to wine tasting and local cooking to food sampling, with stops to view native flora and fauna along the way.

The shop is one block up on the left. Inside is the the Tienda de Naturaleza store that sells books and the kind of "natural," hippiefied trinkets you'd find for sale at Earth Bones back home. It's a good source of information about the natural areas in Guadalupe and Extremadura.

■ Adventures on Foot

The **trail of Isabel la Católica** is the most frequent route taken by hikers in the area (a guided tour led by NatRural will cost 21€ and take five hours). To reach the well-marked trail, leave Guadalupe via C/ Cruz and follow the paved road through the shade of ash and poplar trees as it leads down to the bridge over the Guadalupe River. Crossing it, pick up the sign-posted footpath to the left that reaches the Santa Catalina Hermitage. From there, follow a narrow trail up a modest climb, where you'll be able to see the royal monastery of La Puebla and continue along the bank with the Pico Agudo (Agudo Peak) to the left.

Soon you'll reach the Castaño del Abuelo, an ancient chestnut tree that is mentioned as early as the 14th century when royal and common pilgrims used it as a landmark. Heading down, the trail widens out and follows a stream before it passes the Fuente de la Alevosilla (fountain) on the left and begins to skirt the banks of a small reservoir formed by the River Ruecas. Follow the water until you reach the Presa Cancho del Fresno (dam) where, just a short way past, is a crossover and a small swimming hole. From here, the trail leads to a crossroads, where you'll want to make a right onto the road that leads to the village of Cañamero from the dam.

The hike is roughly 13 km (eight miles) and could take between three to four hours to complete. To return to Guadalupe from Cañamero without retracing your steps, the best bet is to flag or call a taxi (☎ 92 736 71 91 or 92 736 72 36), which should cost around 15€. The tourism office in Cañamero is on C/ Lope de Vega, s/n (☎ 92 736 94 29).

Mérida

■ History

The city of Mérida, with its wealth of Roman monuments, is recognized as the country's best-preserved, most comprehensive example of the prosperous period of Roman rule. This lasted from roughly 50 BC to the early fifth century AD, when the Huns and

northern Germanic tribes overran the Peninsula. In 25 BC Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered that the Cantabrian War veterans of his V Aluade and X Gemina legions be settled on this bank of the Guadiana River in retirement.

Roman Hispania, as it was then known, was divided into three provinces: Tarraconensis in the east, with its capital of Tarraco (Tarragona), Baetica in the south headed by Corduba (Córdoba), and Lusitania in the areas of Extremadura and Portugal, with its capital of Augusta Emerita (Augustus' Veteran Colony), now known as Mérida. Owing to its strategic location along two major Roman roads – one that led to the north as the silver route and the other west through Portugal – the city flourished. The long Roman bridge was built, facilitating connection with the outlying province, and still stands in functioning form today, as does the theater that now hosts summer-time performances. A walk through the city passes temples, aqueducts, a circus and former palaces, along with other architectural marvels that later civilizations of Visigoths, Moors and Christians were prone to alter, expand or altogether bury in order to create their own structures. Mérida, now the regional capital of southern Extremadura, is a blend of these histories, just one big archeological dig that continues to reveal the past.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: From the station *(C/ Cardero, s/n, ☎ 92 431 81 09)* trains leave for **Madrid** and **Cáceres** twice a day. **Badajoz** has up to four trains per day, while **Sevilla** gets only one.

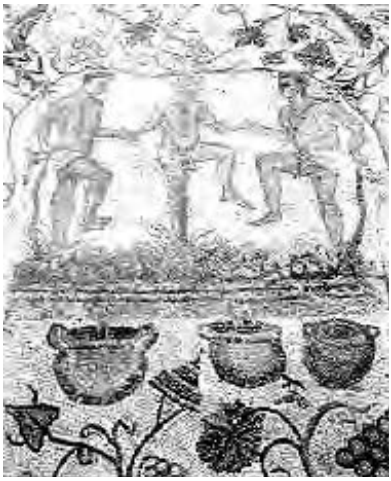
By Bus: The bus station *(Avda de la Libertad, s/n, ☎ 92 437 14 04)* sends three-four buses per day to **Cáceres** and **Trujillo**. **Madrid** and **Sevilla** are each connected by up to eight buses a day.

By Car: From Madrid by car, head southwest on the N-V and, from Badajoz, take the same road east. From Cáceres, the N-630 leads south to Mérida and, from Sevilla, north. Trujillo in the north is connected to Mérida by the E-90.

■ A Walking Tour

Without actually entering any of the sites – which would be a terrible mistake – this walk would take the better part of an hour, with some up- and downhill stretches along the way. Nothing too strenuous here, but to get the most out of the tour, allow an afternoon and about 20€ to get into the most important sites, with a glass of wine or beer along the way.

From the **Plaza de España**, follow C/ Sant Eulalia four blocks, through the shopping district and make a right on C/ José Ramón Melida. The **Museo Nacional de Arte Romano** is opposite the entrances to the Roman theater and amphitheater and a great place to get to know Roman Spain before continuing. The building was designed by Rafael Moneo Valles, who harnessed natural lighting and utilized local bricks in a manner that pays tribute to Roman techniques; lots of displaced columns and arches towering high overhead are the most predominant features. The ground floor is dedicated to the Roman public buildings, while the first floor is full of Roman pottery, statues such as the goddess Ceres who has lost her hands and nose, mosaics and coinage. The *cripta*, or crypt, houses the archeological remains discovered on the site of the museum during its construction in the 1980s. *(Roman Art National Museum, ☎ 92 431 16 90, open summer 10 am-2 pm and 5-7 pm; winter 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, closed Mon.)*



Next door is the **Casa del Anfiteatro**, what are the remains of third- or fourth-century Roman mansions that are still under excavation. A number of beautiful mosaics have survived in the houses, one of which depicts three grape harvesters dancing gleefully hand in hand in little more than loin cloths while they stomp grapes. There is evidence of a small aqueduct, a heating system that once fed the hot baths, kitchen appointments, water pipes – all hinting at a splendor of living that some Spaniards still don't enjoy today. Later, the area was used as a burial sight, or necropolis. *(House of the Amphitheatre, open summers 9:30 am-1:45 pm and 5-7:15 pm, winters 9:30 am-1:45 pm and 4-6:15 pm.)*

The **Anfiteatro Romano** was a place of bloodsport, where gladiatorial games played out before 14,000 spectators while both humans and beasts perished in strange and creative ways. Yeah, we've all seen the movie. This particular amphitheater is one of the best examples in Spain; inaugurated in 8 BC, it is elliptical in shape, with three columned entrances leading into the arena, around which seats are terraced. There were originally three levels, with the lowest box seats reserved for dignitaries, the middle for commoners and the upper tier, of which nothing remains, for peasants and the occasional slave. Chambers along the side held gladiators and beasts. *(Roman Amphitheater; entry fee 5€, which covers the adjoining theater as well.)*

Just a few steps away is the **Teatro Romano** (Roman theater), which dates back to the year 15 BC, not long after the city itself was founded. The theater is remarkably preserved, so much so that it is still used for performances. It was constructed under the supervision of Agrippa, Octavianus Augustus' son-in-law, and originally had space for 6,000 spectators. As in the amphitheater, the seating was arranged according to class. The semicircular chorus is backed by the stage and the façade (*frons scaenae*), with its entrances and two levels of columns interspersed with life-size statues. The top row of columns have largely deteriorated, but at night, with the lights trained in just the right spots and the rest blacked out while the music is playing, the theater feels and looks much as it probably did in its prime.

Classical Theater Festivals

These are held during July and August with elaborate performances on the same stage where Roman plays were performed 2,000 years before. Shows usually start after the Spanish have eaten dinner, around 10:30 pm and tickets run from 10-40€. They can be purchased at the tourism office or by calling ☎ 92 431 78 47.

From the theater exit, make a left and, with the hedges and the chain link fence on your left, follow around to Avenida J. Álvarez Saenz de Buruaga,

along the backside of the theater. Make a right on Vía Ensanche and at the end of this road on the left is the **Casa del Mitreo**. The mansion belonged to a Roman nobleman and is believed to have been constructed on the site of an earlier Mithraic shrine. Besides the various family and business rooms, you'll want to check out the plaster wall paintings and, particularly, the colorful cosmological mosaic, one of the most stunning in all of Spain and evidence of just what the Romans thought of nature and less-than-divine intervention.

Now follow C/ Oviedo until it becomes Graciano, where you enter the **Alcazaba** (Moorish Fortress and Convent). The Alcazaba dates to the ninth century and was built next to the Romans' bridge over the Guadiana, no doubt as a way of insuring the security of the town from intruders. Notice the *aljibe*, or cistern, and in the corner the 15th-century *Conventural*, or convent. Stroll across the Guadiana River on a very, very old bridge, hang a left on C/ Cava and head down to the water.

The **Puente Romano**, left, is long and resilient, with over 729 m (2,300 feet) encompassing 60 arches that have survived with minor assistance for over 2,000 years. The river rolls by, slow and murky.

Entering the city again from the Roman bridge, the **Morería** is on the left. This was the old Moorish neighborhood, and, before that, the quarters of the Visigoths and Romans, now taken over by modern buildings with less-than-obvious signs of its previous occupation.

From C/ Morería, turn onto C/ Juan de Dios. Two blocks ahead on the right is **Museo de Arte Visigodo** (Museum of Visigoth Art), which houses artifacts belonging to that feisty culture that ruled between the Roman and the Arab eras.

Return to the **Plaza de España** just a block away and order a drink at one of the four-corner refreshment stands. You may have to wait awhile or walk up to the counter; *raciones* (larger portions of *tapas*) are served only from these during regular lunch and dinner hours. The plaza itself is a delightful place, with colorful façades and palm trees that make for a Mediterranean mood.

■ Sightseeing

The **Templo de Diana**, right, on the corner of C/ Sagasta and Sta. Catalina, dates to the first century AD and is Mérida's only surviving Roman worship site. It is made even more spectacular by the Renaissance-era **Conde de los Corbos Palace** that was carefully constructed within its Corinthian pillars.

On Avenida de Extremadura, **Iglesia de Santa Eulalia**, is a Christian church first built in the fifth century

AD during the reign of Constantine to honor Mérida's patron Saint Eulalia. She was martyred during the Roman era and is believed to have been buried at the sight along with a number of other archbishops. Underneath the church, which was rebuilt in Romanesque style in the 13th century, a veritable architectural treasure trove has been discovered – the original chapel honoring the early Christian martyrs, paleo-Christian stone sarcophagi and, still deeper, an ancient Roman palace. The museum displays works from each of these cultures and the depths can be explored along a series of walkways that have been constructed.

Spain's only surviving hippodrome, the **Circo Romano**, once had a capacity for 30,000 spectators. Chariot races were held here and, once it had been flooded, mock naval battles. It's in the southwestern part of the city next to the N-630/N-V, also known as the Avenida de La Princesa Sofía.

■ Where to Stay

The **Parador Vía de la Plata** *(Plazoleta de la Constitución 3, ☎ 92 431 38 00, merida@parador.es, d 100€)* occupies the site of a former Roman temple dedicated to the Concordia de Augusta. The building itself was an 18th-century convent that later served as a hospital and jail. In keeping with the town's heritage, Roman, Visigoth and Mozarabic relics decorate the common areas and inner-courtyard. The Andalucian-styled patio and Mozarabic gardens are a pretty sight from some of the rooms. Others look out onto the city and all are simple but tasteful in décor, perhaps a little worse for wear than one might expect from a *parador*, but comfortable nonetheless. The *parador's* restaurant is, not surprisingly, devoted to regional cuisine, with such offerings as *criadillos* (truffles), the *caldereta extremeña* (a stew), and cold gazpacho soups Extremaduran-style.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Hotel Lusitania *(C/ Oviedo 12, ☎ 92 431 61 12, d 50€)* has a prime location two blocks away from the Guadiana River and a matter of blocks from all of the Roman sites. The partying zone along C/ John Lennon is just out the door. Rooms are spacious and well-equipped, with bath, television, phones, even windows!

Hostal El Alfarero *(C/ Sagasta 40, ☎ 92 430 31 83, elalfarero@telefonica.net, d 25-35€)* is in the modern area of Mérida, occupying part of a 1970s or '80s high-rise apartment (which isn't always bad after you've stayed in a few 16th-century hostels). The staff is friendly, the rooms are new, with their own bath and television, some with windows that open out onto the noisy street. Singles are, however, as narrow as a hallway. It's a happy place, though, and only a two-minute walk to the amphitheater.

Hostal Senero *(C/ Holguín 12, ☎ 92 431 72 07)* is near the Arco de Trajano on a narrow street with small, refurnished rooms in an old building that you could well get lost in. If the lights go out on your way up the stairs, just look for the orange, glowing lights on the walls and mash 'em. Rooms with bath cost around 30€.

■ Where to Eat

Restaurante Altair *(Avda. José Fernández López, s/n, ☎ 92 430 45 12)* has a twin in Trujillo and specializes in Mediterranean fare bolstered by the region's typical products – lamb, ham and thank you ma'am. Try the fresh roasted cod with lamb chops (*bacalao fresco asado con manitas de cordero*) and the toasted pineapple with banana sauce (*piña tostada con crema de plátano*) for desert. Yum.

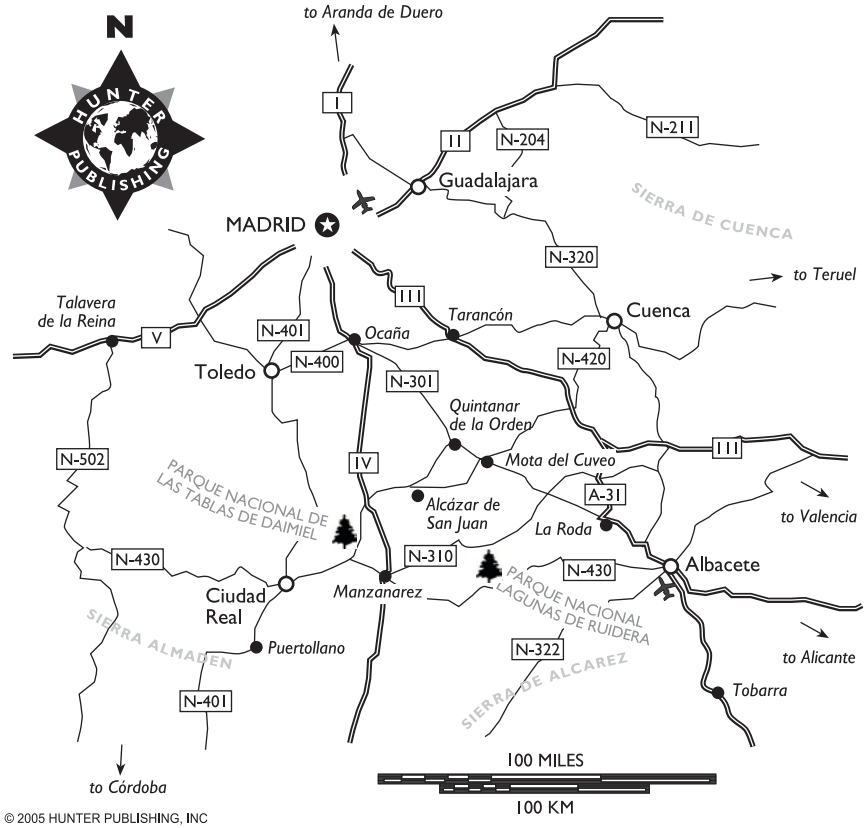
DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

El Torero *($-$$, Ctra Alange km O, ☎ 92 437 17 89)* is a little easier on the pocket book but harder on the walking shoes. To get here, cross the Puente Romano and make the first left on Carretera de Alange. Walls are covered in bullfighting posters and photographs. The kitchen smells of barbecued meat (*carnes a la brasa*). If you get too full, just book a room in its hostel (40€) and crawl into bed for the night.

For quick and cheap food head to **Chele** *($, C/ Calderón de la Barca 14, ☎ 92 431 55 56).* There you can pick from any number of combination plates (*platos combinados*) that don't actually reflect the prevailing Extremaduran cuisine.

For slow and expensive food, try **Nicolás** *($$$-$$$$, C/ Félix Valverde Lillo 13, ☎ 92 431 96 10)*, reputed as one of the better (not best) restaurants in Mérida. This is classic regional fare, *jamón ibérico*, *cabrito*, *cordero* (lamb), *tencas finchas* (fried fish) and homemade deserts to upset the balance.

Castilla-La Mancha



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Castilla-La Mancha

From Madrid, Castilla-La Mancha is an arid crossroads to the cities of Extremadura, Andalucía, Valencía and Cataluña. Without the cultural diversity and attractiveness of Toledo, or the natural beauty of a hilltop city such as Cuenca, most travelers would quickly pass on through. Sweeping views are unbroken in every direction, of parched plains, of a few modest hills, a smattering of villages and no major, bustling commercial centers. Madrid, by all geographical respects a part of this region claiming the southern half of the country's high, central plateau, was granted separate autonomous status in the early 1980s when, after the demise of

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Franco, Spain's new regions were defined. What remained were the provinces of Toledo, Ciudad Real, Cuenca, Guadalajara and, added to them, Albacete; together they form a conglomeration of New Castile that lacks a central axis, a spurious realm with little political influence and the Iberian Peninsula's lowest population density. For each square mile here there are 54 residents, compared to the national average of 192.

Mountains form a natural wind- and rain-break around the perimeter of Castilla-La Mancha; the Sistema Central runs west to east in the north; the Sistema Iberica runs north to south in the east, the Sierra Morena runs west to east in the south; and the southern edge of the Sierra de Gredos confines the western border. With the exception of the fertile river valleys of the Tajo (Tagus) and Guadiana, the interior is mostly comprised of the plains, or La Mancha, from the Moorish word *Al Mansha*, meaning dry lands.

This stark beauty is occasionally punctuated by white windmills capped with black, pointed roofs. Holdovers from the 16th and 17th century, they are the beloved landmarks of the region and the brunt of its most famous joke.

This was the imaginative canvas of Cervantes, left, the favored land of his blundering ideologue, Don Quixote de La Mancha. "Take care, your worship," said Sancho, "those things over there are not giants but windmills, and what seem to be their arms are the sails, which are whirled round in the wind and make them turn." "It is quite clear," replied Don Quixote, "that you are not experienced in this matter of adventures. They are giants and if you are afraid, go away and say your prayers, while I advance and engage them in fierce and unequal battle."

The ingenious *hidalgo*, with his long, cadaverous frame, consistently outmatched by his own wits, was perfectly placed in this setting; only a land as dry in humor and backward in concept could sustain such an epic adventure; a parody of properness when there was little of such to be found in this poor, country region – a commentary on government set in a realm governed by the laws of the landscape and little more.

Cervantes had honored a land of peasants and nomadic herds with the right balance of mistrust and adoration. In doing so, he had inadvertently introduced Valdepeñas wines, Manchego cheeses, the lush pine forests of the Serranía de Cuenca and the embittered wetlands of Las Tablas de Daimiel to future travelers that otherwise might have missed them.

> *"So, like a good knight, he decided to add the name of his country to his own and call himself Don Quixote de la Mancha."*
>
> Miguel de Cervantes

Toledo

■ History

Tourists in droves? Yes. With reason? *Sin duda,* as the Spanish like to say. Toledo was the cradle of indoctrination for Spain long before the Catholics ever thought of Madrid as a capital. It is a bulwarked city and perhaps the most effective example to be found

in the country, the color of dry straw growing atop a giant, mangled piece of rock. The city came into its own once the Visigoths had displaced another Germanic tribe, the Alani, in AD 453, and established Toledo as the capital of their Hispania. Prior to this, the Romans had founded Toletum, as it was then known, in 192 BC over a land that had seen the settlement of Celtiberians and Iberians.

A local tradition has it that the city, by all accounts unassailable, was lost to the Visigoths by a dastardly duo of double-cross. First it took King Roderick, the last ruler of the Visigoths, to grow fond of his close friend and advisor's young daughter. In the annals of legend he began to watch her, from a hidden perch, as she bathed in the Turía River that wraps around the city and carves a natural defensive gorge on three of its sides. One fated day, when he could no longer contain his passion, he thrashed out into the water and raped the girl. Learning of this, the advisor resolved to get even and stormed off to Morocco where he recruited the assistance of the Moors and led them into the country for what would turn out to be a very, very long stay. The Moors defeated Roderick's troops and thereafter conquered the heavily fortified city of Toledo with the help of the advisor, who had shared his knowledge of the city's vulnerable areas.

The Moors would rule Toledo and much of the country from AD 712 on, until the Christians under King Alfonso VI took back the city in 1085 and the Catholic Monarchs the country in 1492. King Carlos V and his son Felipe II kept their courts at Toledo until 1565, when the capital of Spain was once and for all established in Madrid, just 40 km (24 miles) north.

The move was made in some part because of the lack of space within the fortified area of Toledo (as a small consolation, Toledo was named capital of Castilla-La Mancha in the 1980s); the result was that its population was held low, buildings were constructed tall and tight – to the point that they came to obscure much of the heralded Catedral.

Streets are harrowingly narrow and only one major road allows vehicular access to the upper-city. What this means is that the sights – of mixed styles attributed to the Christians, Islams and Hebrews that shared the city and earned its nickname, "the City of the Three Cultures" – are packed into a small area. Stretch the legs for some up and downhill walks, save room for Toledo's delicious marzipan, and make way for the pushy tourists that, for some reason, seem to want to beat you to the sights.

■ Tourist Information

Plaza del Ayuntamiento 1, ☎ *92 525 40 30*, or *Puerta de Bisagra,* ☎ *92 522 08 43.*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: Toledo's pretty Neo-Mudéjar train station (☎ *92 522 30 99)* is below the town, past the main roundabout and across the Azarquiel bridge . Trains run regularly from Toledo to Madrid (1½ hrs) from 7 am-9 pm and from Madrid to Toledo, 7 am-8:25 pm.

By Bus: The bus station *(Avda Castilla-La Mancha,* ☎ *92 521 58 50)* is in the Barrio de Las Covachuelas beneath the fortified city. From the large roundabout, Ronda del Granadal, head north a few blocks. From Mon.-Sat., buses to

and from Madrid depart every half-hour between 6:30 am and 10 pm. On Sunday they run from 8:30 am-11:30 pm.

By Car: The N-401 connects Toledo and Madrid. It's a 40-minute drive, largely boring.

■ Sightseeing

The **Plaza de Zocodover**, crowded with patio restaurants and at last count one McDonald's, is the home base for touring the city. From it, most of the sights, except for the Alcázar, are down hill... but not too far down hill.

Before or after venturing into the city, take time to admire two of Toledo's most impressive bridges spanning the Tagus River. The **Puente de Alcántara**, on the east side of the hill close to the Alcázar, was first constructed by the Romans but owes its current appearance to alterations made by the Moors and Christians. Steps lead down to it from the Paseo de Cabestreros. On the city side is an 18th-century Mudéjar battlement tower and the last surviving one of its three gates, the 10th-century Moorish **Puerta de Alcántara**. Passing over the bridge leads to the **Castillo de San Servando**, built by the Moors but completely overhauled in the Mudéjar style in the 14th century. It now serves as a youth hostel and university dormitory.

The **Puente de San Martín**, on the opposite side of the hill in the west below El Monasterio de San Juan de Los Reyes, is a 13th-century bridge and the only one in Toledo that still has its two defensive towers. This bridge is best reached by following Calle San Martín, west one block from the plaza in front of the monastery.

Catedral

On a recent trip to Toledo, a normally stoic friend of mine admitted that, upon entering the Catedral a few years before, the immensity and beauty of it all caused him to unexpectedly shed tears. The Catedral of Sevilla is larger and more grandiose, but for many the Catedral of Toledo is Spain's most evocative. It was begun in 1226 but took 250 years to complete, around the time Columbus was discovering the New World and the Catholic Monarchs were conquering Granada.

With its grand construction, the Moorish mosque that had claimed the site and had previously been converted from the Visigothic basilica was lost. The exterior is frank in its Gothicism and mostly obscured from proper view by the three-story buildings crowding around it. Owing to its long period of construction, the interior is a mix of Mudéjar, Gothic and Renaissance.

After entering through the Puerta Llana, the Renaissance ***coro*** (choir) immediately confronts you in the center of the space facing the high altar. It is a massive square of carved stone, alabaster and dark wood. The layers forming the stalls where the priests sit during mass are carved with figures depicting scenes of the conquest of Granada and, above them, biblical figures carved in

the 16th century – those on the left by the Spaniard Alonso Berruguete and to the right by Frenchman Felipe Vigarní Bargoña.

The transept separates the choir from **Capilla Mayor**, for many the most impressive feature of the Cathedral. It dates to the late 16th century, with an intricately fashioned wrought-iron cage from which the gold-encrusted *reredos* can be appreciated as it rises high above the altar, with scenes of prophets, the Virgin and Child, and a huge depiction of the crucifix. The tomb of Cardinal Mendoza also lies within.

(From Plaza de Zocodover, follow Calle del Comercio until it becomes Calle del Hombre de Palo and enters the Plaza del Ayuntamiento; ☎ 925 22 22 41, open 10 am-12 and 4-6 pm, free admission.)

To light the tabernacle, which had dwelt in the shadows of the towering *reredos*, the architect Narciso Tomé was commissioned to strategically cut holes in the Catedral's exterior walls so natural light would be cast on the tabernacle during mass. Known as the **Transparente**, these were cut low on the back of the main altar and across the ambulatory high on an exterior wall and adorned with angelic sculptures and paintings so as to conceal them but not block the new light. Of the Cathedral's 22 chapels, mention should be made of the ornate Gothic **Capilla de Santiago**, with a statue of Santiago Matamoros (the Moor Killer) atop a thrashing stallion and with the tombs of Álvaro de Luna and Juana Pimentel, as well as the **Capilla del Virgen del Sagrario**, patron saint of Toledo. The **Sacristy** displays a long hall of El Grecos depicting the 12 disciples, Jesus and Mary. There are other notable works by Lucas Jordán, Van Dyck, Tristán and Goya, whose 'The Arresting of Jesus on the Mount of Olives' is among the highlights. *(Open 10:30 am-6 pm and Sun. 2-6 pm, 4.95€ includes entrance to the Catedral's treasury.)*

El Monasterio de San Juan de Los Reyes

The monastery was begun in the 15th century in the late Gothic style under the guidance of architect Juan Guas. It is a lofty sight when arriving in Toledo, with numerous spires, peaked arches and a squat octagonal tower atop it. In commemoration of their victorious battle over the Moors at Toro in 1476 the Catholic Monarchs commissioned this Franciscan monastery. What looks like chains hanging curiously from the walls are actually shackles. These belonged to Christians that had been enslaved by the Moors and were ultimately freed during the liberation of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs. They, Ferdinand and Isabella, had planned to be entombed here. After they had defeated Boabdil and the last of the Moors at Granada and thus assured their legacy (one that also cruelly included the creation of the Spanish Inquisition), they chose instead to lie eternally entombed in the Catedral of Granada. *(C/ Reyes Católicos 17, ☎ 92 522 38 02, open 10 am-1:45 pm and 3:30-6 pm.)*

Alcázar

From the highest perch in the city, this great square of brick construction with four steeple towers at each corner has long served as a fortress, though not in its current incarnation. Romans, Visigoths, Moors, Christians all took part in building, altering and extending the various forts on this site. The current citadel, which serves as a regional library (books) and military museum (swords, shields, armor, guns...), is a reconstruction of the Christian rendition built during the reign of King Carlos V. The original was almost

completely destroyed in a series of struggles, the War of Succession, the Napoleonic Wars and the Spanish Civil War, when the fascists took refuge inside. You can listen to a crackling tape recording of General Moscardó – whose son the Republicans had threatened to assassinate if he did not surrender the alcázar – telling his son to prepare to die. *(Cuesa Carlos V 2, ☎ 92 522 30 38, open Tues.-Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm, entry 2€.)*

El Greco's Toledo

The Tears of St. Peter, El Greco (Hospital de San Juan Bautista de Afuera, Toledo)

Born Doménikos Theotokópoulos in Crete in 1541, the famed painter who came to be known as El Greco (the Greek) spent his greatest working years in Toledo. From 1585 on El Greco lived in the medieval palace of the Marqués de Villena, since destroyed, from which he worked continually under commissions for the churches and monasteries of the region until his death in 1614. The artist's great works (those that have not been spirited away by the Prado in Madrid) are scattered in museums and churches throughout Toledo. El Greco lies entombed in the church of **Santo Domingo El Antiguo** *(Plaza de Santo Domingo el Antiguo, ☎ 92 522 29 30, open Tues.-Sun. 11 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm)*, for which he earned his first commission in Spain and which resulted in his work *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1577-1579). The **Museo de Santa Cruz** *(C/ Cervantes 3, ☎ 92 522 14 02, open 10 am-6:30 pm and Sun. 10 am-2 pm, free admission)* is a museum of archeology, local crafts and fine arts that includes a series of El Greco's works.

The **Museo Parroquia Santo Tomé** *(Plaza del Conde 1, ☎ 92 525 60 98, open 10 am-5:45 pm, entry 1.50€)* houses El Greco's masterpiece, *The Burial of the Count Orgaz*. The arched canvas vividly depicts the heavens of elongated saints and eerily swirling clouds floating above earth. Of the lower half of the painting, legend has it that Saints Stephen and Augustine miraculously appeared to place the Count de Orgaz in his coffin as a sign of reverence for his generosity to the church. The young boy on the left is Jorge Manuel, El Greco's only son, from whose pocket dangles a handkerchief dated 1578 (the year of Jorge's birth) and which is signed by the artist.

The **Museo y Casa de El Greco** *(C/ Samuel Leví 3, ☎ 92 522 40 46, open 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm, entry 2.40€)* wasn't actually the home of El Greco, but sits close by it. This museum dedicated to the artist includes such works as *The Apostle*, *San Bernardino*, *View and Plan of Toledo* and *The Redeemer*. Many of El Greco's other works are on display in the sacristy of the Catedral.

La Judería

The old Jewish quarter in the western part of the fortified city begins at the intersection of the streets Taller del Moro, Santo Tomé and El Salvador. The easiest way to reach it is from the Catedral via Calle de La Trinidad running west past its northern façade. Before the Jews were expelled from the city

and the country with the Catholic edict of 1492, they thrived in this area of narrow, cobbled streets and now-vanished synagogues. Of the 11 or so synagogues that once welcomed worshippers, only two remain.

Sinagoga El Tránsito *(C/ de Samuel Leví, ☎ 92 522 36 65, open 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, entry 2.40€, includes entrance to the museum)* was founded in 1357 by Samuel Leví on the street that now bears his name. Leví was an advisor to then King Pedro I, otherwise known as "Pedro the Cruel," and managed to obtain permission for this synagogue when such constructions were restricted throughout the country. It is decorated with plaster latticework, Hebraic inscriptions and topped by a beautiful Mudéjar coffered ceiling with Arabic inscriptions. The synagogue's **Museo Sefardi** exhibits Sephardic relics and other displays designed to shed light on the faith practiced within these walls. From here, follow Calle Reyes Catolicos, past the cliff known as Roca Tarpeya, from which condemned criminals were once tossed to their screaming demise. At the intersection with Calle Santa Ana, make a right.

Sinagoga de Santa María la Blanca *(C/ de los Reyes Católicos 4, ☎ 92 522 36 65, open 10 am-2 pm and 3:30-6 pm)*, built in the 12th century as a mosque, was shortly thereafter converted by the Jews. In the Mudéjar style so common throughout Toledo, it has a central nave (having been converted to a church after the Jews' expulsion) and notable horseshoe arches on its exterior.

SWORDS & SWEETS

Toledo is known for two things (well, three if you count El Greco) – its delicious mazapán and its sharp sabres (initially dulled for safety reasons). A local Toledana mazapán artist described the creation of her small treats as *muy duro* (you can visit her unassuming shop, **Productos Tipicos**, on Calle Trinidad 3). After her explanation, one would agree that it seems a laborious task best left to the experts. From orchards in Valencia the almonds are hauled to Toledo. In adept hands they are submerged momentarily in boiling water and then the skin is sheered off. Adding one part sugar for each part almond, they are lightly mixed together and then fully pulverized into a chalky mix. The substance is then pressed into shapes, moons, stars, whatever, and baked for 10-15 minutes to their golden hue (some variations add egg yolk or other enhancers). Once retrieved, hot and soft, more almonds are added for decoration and a sugar and water glaze is painted over each piece. A word of caution: don't ever enter a mazapán confectionary on an empty stomach.

Walking back to wherever it may be with a gift-wrapped box of mazapán (a sampler costs around 6€), you'll pass one, two, 300 sword shops. Since Roman times Toledo has been known for its metallurgy, and particularly its swords, which for centuries supplied legions of Spanish armies. Then the gun came along and the result has many wishing that it never did. Today the local metallurgists make their living off of curious tourists and by supplying Spanish bullfighters and a handful of fencing schools around the world. The prices range from 10€ for a small dagger to thousands for a replica of the sword of Boabdil, last Moorish ruler in Spain.

■ Where to Stay

The upside to staying outside the walled city of Toledo in the **Parador Conde de Orgaz de Toledo** *(Cerro del Emperador, s/n, ☎ 92 522 18 50, fax 92 522 51 66, toledo@parador.es, d 124€)* is that the panoramic views of the city are spectacular. The parador is located atop the hill (*cerro*) of the Emperor in the *barrio* known as Cigarrales with a look emblematic of the function-first Castilian style – deep wood accents of ceiling beams and balconies contrast with the whitewashed interior walls and chalky stone exterior surfaces. Again, the views. A swimming pool lies in the crook of this U-shaped hotel that in name pays homage to one of the most famous works of Toledo's favorite son, the painter El Greco.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

La Posada de Manolo *(C/ Sixto Ramón Parro 8, ☎ 92 528 22 50, fax 92 528 22 51, www.laposadademanolo.com, laposadademanolo@wanadoo.es, d 70€)* feels like a medieval country chalet. You use clunky old skeleton keys to access your room. Walls are of beige stucco, decorated with shields of armor and scenes of Toledo with pale red brick accents and Moorish arches. Most of the rooms have heavy exposed wooden beams in the ceilings and leather Moorish reading lamps. Windows and lounging terraces have admirable views of the Catedral half a block away and Los Cigarrales de Toledo. It is a pleasure to wake up here in this simple, old-world establishment. Each room has full bath, television and air conditioning and a simple breakfast buffet is served in the morning.

The elegant ☆☆☆ **Hotel Carlos V** *(C/ Trastamara 1, ☎ 92 522 21 00, d 111€)* has fine accommodations a block off the popular Plaza de Zocodover, but just around the corner, in the back, is the reason I mention it. Facing the front of the hotel, follow the Calle Juan Labrador that runs along it to the left. A little way down on the right you'll see a nondescript sign for a **Pension** and an old wooden door leading into it. The rooms are simple but clean inside and you'll have to share a bath with everyone else on the floor, but few people find this place and, when they do, they often pass it by because there is no staff on hand to greet you or even a reception desk. You pay for the rooms at the reception in the Hotel Carlos V. A single costs 17€. During the recent Semana Santa festivals, when the town was overrun with tourists and there was no hotel or hostel in town with a vacancy, this place was a life-saver.

Hostal Nuevo Labrador *(C/ Juan Labrador 10, ☎ 92 522 26 20, fax 92 522 93 99)*, across a narrow walking street from the Hotel Carlos V, has very nice modern rooms, spacious with spotless baths. A double averages 40€.

Hostal Casa de Cisneros *(C/ Cardenal Cisneros 12, ☎ 92 522 88 28, www.hostal-casa-cisneros.com, d 96€)* is another of Toledo's enchanting medieval homes that has been renovated as a hostel. This house dates to the 16th century, built atop the remains of an 11th-century Moorish palace. If you can reserve one of the 10 rooms, don't hesitate. This place is all wood beams and mellow lighting with rough stone walls, stained wood floors and solid antique furnishings. You pay not for a finely attuned staff (friendly, yes), but for the experience.

Hostal Puerta de Bisagra *(C/ Del Porto 5, ☎ 92 528 52 77, fax 92 528 52 77, d 46€)* is located just inside Toledo's walls by the beautiful Bisagro gateway at the base of the hill. If your knees don't take kindly to uphill walks, opt for one of the hostels mentioned above, which are all at the top of the town, then drive your car up to the underground parking lot (hope that there is a space) and walk downhill from there. This isn't a bad place to stay, though, as far as hostels are concerned. The rooms are accessed along wooden balconies surrounding a traditional courtyard that is well lit by skylights. The sleeping quarters are small but adequately furnished with television, full bath and air conditioning.

Because of its location on the Plaza de Zocodover, **Hostal Centro** *(C/ 92 525 70 91, fax 92 525 78 48, d 42€)* is usually fully booked. The rooms are modern but nothing special, with cheap wooden armoires and nightstands. The balconettes overlooking the plaza are nice, though. Bathrooms, television and air conditioning are standard accessories.

■ What to Eat & Where

The cuisine of Castilla-La Mancha enjoys a reserved, but notable reputation throughout Spain. Field game frequently finds its way into dishes, including pheasant (*faisán*), rabbit (*conejo*), wild boar (*jabalí*) and partridge (*perdiz*). The latter is quite common braised and served *a la toledana*, as is the *codornices* (quail) *a la toledana*. *Pisto Manchego*, a steamy vegetable stew, has spread across the tables of Spain, as has the region's *quesos Manchegos*. These cheeses range from the soft and mild *fresco* aged 60 days, to the *curado* aged 90 days, and finally *añejo* that takes up to seven months to acquire its strong and pungent yellow hue. *Sopa de Almendras*, a hot, milky soup flavored with almonds, and *cuchifrito*, crunchy fried pieces of suckling pig, are both common items on Toledano menus. *Galianos* is a thick, hot soup of fried partridge and rabbit flavored with red wine, cinnamon, onion, garlic and saffron, heaped with flat bread, or *torta*. For sweets, see the callout on Toledo's *mazapán* above page 213.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

The word has been out on **Restaurante Adolfo** *($$$$, C/ La Granada 6, ☎ 92 522 73 21)* for a good, long while. It's a local fixture in Toledo that now, more often than not, caters to an international tourist crowd. Here the chefs take the traditional local recipes of Castilla-La Mancha and change things around a little bit. The specialty is a vegetable-stuffed rabbit loin. The squid salad is a delicious starter, doused in Salmorejo, a thick, cold baste of fresh vegetables similar to Gazpacho.

La Abadía *($$, C/ Núñez de Arce 3, ☎ 92 525 11 40)* will also be crowded, but mostly with locals that have discovered this cool restaurant in the Plaza de San Nicolas. Squat seats and tables occupy a number of chambers, both upstairs and down. During regular dining hours the bar is a good place to pick from the *pulgas* (meaning literally 'fleas'), small bits of meat, cheese or seafood sandwiched between slices of bread. Most order *raciones*, or larger servings of *tapas*, to share. The house specializes in *un variado de carne* (a variety

of meats), though you'll find vegetarian salads and a variety of other non-meat choices on the menu.

El Cobertizo *($$, C/ Hombre de Palo 9, ☎ 92 522 38 09)* came highly recommended by the concierge at Carlos V. This nice restaurant occupies a second floor with windows overlooking a busy pedestrian street lined with sword shops and marzipan bakeries. Try the *trucha encurtido*, a pickled trout popular in the region. *Asados*, or roasts, are also recommended, as are the *pescados a la sal* (salted fish), of which the waiter recommends – justifiably – the *merluza*, or hake.

Mesón de Don Diego *($$, Corral Don Diego 5, ☎ 92 525 35 52)* isn't especially reputable for its cooking (the afternoon *menu del día* is 12€). What it does have is a unique setting in a private plaza entered through a single gate. This neat and potentially romantic courtyard has outdoor tables lit by candles and overhung by strands of lighted, flapping flags. The house specialties are *cordero* (lamb) and *cabrito* (roast kid).

■ Nightlife

Toledo is not known for its bar scene. There are no main areas packed with bars and drunken people, just a smattering of watering holes here and there. If you miss the English language, **Obrien's Irish Bar** half a block down from Plaza de Zocodover on Calle Armas is a good place to have a drink in the early evening and pick at the bartenders' knowledge of the scene in Toledo. Emilio, if he is still working there, sports a bushy goatee and happily passes on information (and free shirts for good tips).

Picoro is one of the few places where there is guaranteed to be a crowd late at night. It's a fashionable place, with three levels, a ground dance floor, suave lighting and sultry nude black and white photography. The other late-night hangout is **Café Teatro Dodici** in Plaza Corral de La Campaña. This posh place is wide-open like a cross between a palace and a fancy Western saloon, with wood paneling everywhere, a long carved bar and a lofty DJ station. It's dead until 1:30 am when the disco starts bumping.

I've heard rumors of a great disco beneath the underground car park at the top of the hill across C/ Moscardo from the Alcázar. Maybe you'll have better luck finding it. The same goes for **Agua Loca**, reported to me by a Basque after my last trip to Toledo and apparently a disco in the country outside of town capable of holding 4-6,000 people.

In the Path of Don Quixote

Was Don Quixote even half the man his creator was? Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) was born outside of Madrid. When young, he developed a love of books and eventually swore off a university education. His first poem was published at the age of 21, the same year he was forced to flee the country for Italy following assault accusations. His life, as an itinerant adventurer, had begun. In Naples he enlisted as a soldier with the Spanish infantry. Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish-Italian confederacy had reached a break-

ing point, and Cervantes found himself in the midst of a significant naval battle a year after his enlistment. Stricken with fever, he reportedly refused to lie below decks during the battle and emerged as a valiant fighter, receiving two gunshot wounds to the chest and another to his left hand that would render it useless for the rest of his life. The Ottoman Turks had lost their hold over the Mediterranean. Cervantes' life as a distinguished soldier would play out over the next few years until his planned return to Spain.

En route to his homeland with letters of recommendation from King Don Juan de Austria, Cervantes' ship was attacked by Barbary corsairs; all aboard, including the future author and his brother, were captured and sold into slavery in Algeria. The letters sustained Cervantes' life as a captive and endeared him to his captors. He was apparently a stoic leader among his fellow captives and, despite at least four failed escape attempts, managed to avoid the severe punishment, torture or death that would have befallen most slaves for such an act. He remained in captivity for five years, until his family was able to earn his release in 1580.

Cervantes' return to Spain would lead to 25 years of poverty, with odd jobs here and there and little to show for it all. The life of Cervantes the adventurer had come to an end. But the legend of Cervantes the writer would soon be assured in 1605, when *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* was published to rave reviews.

Castilla-La Mancha bears the stamp of its beloved author on storefronts, *mesones*, inns and street signs. In almost every town with even a remote connection to the epic adventurer Don Quixote, you will find a statue or plaque (or likely both) paying homage to the work and attracting tourists that pay to experience a little bit of it. The windmills of the Manchas, or plains, are scattered in isolated clusters or singularly atop hills. They were introduced into Spain from the Low Countries in the late 16th century, a short time before Cervantes would pen his famous story and create one of its most popular scenes out of them. Mistaking the bright white windmills as giants, Quixote rode atop his horse Rocinante to attack them with all the bravery and ill consideration only a truly heroic dunce could muster. "The wind turned it with such violence that it shivered his weapon in pieces, dragging the horse and his rider with it, and sent the knight rolling badly injured across the plain." Man, machine and the land had thus been properly introduced and the status of each assured. The windmills that survive to this day ceased their functions at the turn of the 20th century.

■ Driving Itinerary

Begin in the town of **Consuegra** in the southern Toledan Mancha. The yellowed Mount Calderico outside of town is topped by a row of windmills that meet a ruined castle at one end. The windmills have posthumously been awarded names such as the *Vixen*, the *Turkish Woman* and *Sancho Panza*, that blubbering, weighty companion of Don Quixote.

From Consuegra, head east to Madridejos and pick up the N-IV south to **Puerto Lápice**. This town is notable for its typical inns, each emblazoned with a name referencing Cervantes' masterpiece. One particular inn, the Venta de Don Quixote, is believed to have been the haunt of the fictitious knight. Continue south on the N-IV and at Villarta de San Juan turn southeast in the direction of **Argamasilla de Alba**. Cervantes, never a stranger to trouble, found himself imprisoned here after an unsubstantiated murder

charge. It is said, among the conspirators of the Spanish tourism board, that the author penned the first pages of Don Quixote while here in captivity.

Campo de Criptana is the next destination and best reached by heading northeast to Tomelloso, then north in the direction of Alcazar de San Juan before turning east roughly 15 km (nine miles) later. Campo de Criptana preserves those windmills that Quixote mistook for giants. They poke out of the Sierra de la Paz, 10 of the original 32 still standing. The oldest, the *Infante*, dates to 1500. To see even more windmills, head east on the N-420 to **Mota del Cuevo**, which boasts seven.

The final destination is **El Toboso**, and a far-fetched one at that. It is the literary home and "birthplace" of Dulcinea, that unattainable femme that pervades Don Quixote's adventures but never physically approaches them. The **Casa de Dulcinea**, a restored 16th-century farmhouse with a collection of clothes and tools of the day, was the residence of Doña Ana Martínez Zarco de Morales, herself identified with Dulcinea in El Quixote's admirable quest for a new individualism apart from the oppressive 16th-century Spanish society.

Cuenca

In Spain there are many ancient cities fortified atop high and imposing rocky escarpments. It is one of the great pleasures of this country to hike a steep road and pay the toll in sweat; to pass through a gate that is five, six or seven hundred years old and still intact; to find a city relatively unchanged since its first incarnation and to look out from the edge of a cliff and see a red and eroded terrain or a lush valley fed by a clear river that hasn't been strangled into subservience. Segovia and Toledo draw praise for their monumental jewels – a Roman aqueduct, a Moorish fortress, an immense, stark cathedral. Ronda is beautiful for its sheer cliff, a 300-foot descent to the bottom that citizens during the Spanish Civil War once made against their will.

For its part, Cuenca (the old city that overlooks a newer city built 300 or so years ago) is small and modest by comparison. It has beautiful monuments but it is not all beautiful monuments. It is a joy simply because man, in developing the city, took the natural setting into consideration and with planning and structural ingenuity made the town a harmonious part of it. Two rivers, the Júcar and Huécar, flow through nearby pine forests of the Serranía de Cuenca into gorges that wrap the medieval city above in a protective armor of vertical rock and water. Centuries-old houses cling to the high rim, hanging their shadows on the cliffs from protruding balconies and patios that seem to defy gravity.

Switchback trails have been cut into the rock to connect the town and the water; a pedestrian suspension bridge spans the Huécar River with stunning views of the hanging houses, part of a captivating little city that circles the perimeter of the hill, filled with the vestiges of Moorish and Christian civil architecture and appearing to fit as well as a jeweled crown atop the head of a Spanish king.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The train station *(C/ Mariano Catalina, ☎ 96 922 07 20)* is located in the newer part of town, just off the large Calle Fermín Caballero. Trains connecting **Valencia** (four hours, up to

four per day) with **Madrid** (three hours, up to six per day) stop in Cuenca.

By Bus: The bus station *(C/ Fermín Caballero, 20, ☎ 96 922 70 87)* is next to the train station. Nine buses per day run to **Madrid** (2½-three hours); two per day to **Toledo** (2½-three hours); three to **Valencia** (3½ hrs); and one to **Barcelona** (four hours).

By Car: From Madrid, take the N-111/E-901 southeast and at Tarrancón head east on the N-400. From Toledo, the N-400 runs due east to Cuenca. From Valencia, take the E-3 west to Requena, then pick up the A-3/N-901 to Motilla del Palancar. From Motilla, head north on the N-320.

■ Sightseeing

The oblong **Plaza Mayor** is little more than a gently declining open space in the center of the old city. It lacks the structural indicators of a master-planned medieval town square that would have four uniformed façades atop a ground floor arcade and a statue in the center. As with the narrow and unaligned roads and the misshapen houses throughout Cuenca, it adheres to the rock and conforms to its shape. It does have what the others are lacking, a crisp, unimpeded view of the town's most impressive architectural and cultural relic, the Catedral.

La Catedral

Built during the 12th and 13th centuries, Cuenca's cathedral evokes the transition from Romanesque to Gothic and is the earliest example of the latter to be found in Spain (architectural know-it-alls also point out that the Catedral's heavily ornamented transept, vaults and polygonal apse have a unique Anglo-Norman influence). The newer façade that immediately presents itself from the plaza has a troubled history. In the 18th century it partially collapsed for the first time. It was repaired with Baroque touches and then, in 1902, the Moorish Giraldillo tower, the only remnant of the Moorish mosque that had once occupied the spot, collapsed. It took the repaired façade with it. The neo-Gothic one you see today was begun in 1910 and nobody knows when or if it will ever be completed.

The 13th-century Palacio Episcopal (Bishop's Palace) houses the **Museo Diocesano-Catedralicio** *(C/ Obispo Valero s/n, ☎ 96 921 20 11, open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4:30-6:30 pm, Sat. 11 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm)*. The museum displays a varied collection of art dating from the 15th to 18th centuries, when the city of Cuenca was prospering through its wool and textile trade. In addition to the liturgical relics, there are a few paintings by El Greco, sculptures and examples of traditional Cuenca crafts.

Across the Calle del Obispo Valero from the Diocesan museum is the **Museo Arqueológico** *(☎ 92 130 29 69, Open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*. This archeological museum is filled with discoveries from

the province, dating from prehistory to medieval times. The 16th-century building it occupies was once the city's granary.

At the termination of the Calle del Obispo Valero, you'll reach the **Casas Colgadas**, Cuenca's famous trademarks. These hanging houses are of plaster and wood construction and date to the 14th century. They rise from the face of the gorge like a natural extension of it, with overhanging eaves and stacked balconies long supported by sturdy cantilevers that have kept them from crashing into the river below. Here, overlooking the Huécar gorge, are the most attractive and intact examples of such houses to be found in Cuenca. For a picture-perfect opportunity, follow the slanted road beneath them down to the **Puente San Pablo**, a footbridge over the River Huécar that offers the best views of these curious façades.

During the last century the Casas Colgadas have been renovated and in 1966 the spectacular **Museo de Arte Abstraco Español** *(Casas Colgadas, ☎ 96 921 29 83, open Tues.-Fri. 11 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. 11 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm)* was established within them. The painter and collector Fernando Zóbel can be credited with creating this world-class museum during a period when Spain's artists were once again growing bold and successful despite the lingering pall of Franco's dictatorship. In speaking to the writer James Michener in the 1960s while he was researching what would be his unequivocal and authoritative book on Spain, *Iberia*, Zóbel said, "Tell your friends who may be interested that these men are as good as Picasso and Miró were when they began." They are, among others, the painters Antoni Tápies, Mompó, Tormer, Canogar and Zóbel himself. Sculptors include Eduardo Chillida, Oteiza, Chirimo and Serrano, whose works decorate the angulated spaces and vast exhibition salons between numerous flights of stairs rising through coffered Mudéjar ceilings. All are lighted by Gothic lattice windows that look out into the air of the gorge above the river.

Other Sights

At the opposite end of the old city from the Casas Colgadas is the **Torre Mangana**. To reach it, follow the Calle de Santa María out of the Plaza Mayor. This tall, unadorned tower stands as solitary proof of the Arab fortress it once was part of. Today it serves as the city's clock tower. En route to the tower from the plaza, you'll pass by the **Museo de Las Ciencas** *(open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm),* a decidedly contemporary structure set amid, and in contrast to, the old city architecture left behind in this quarter by the Moors. One street over, on Calle Alfonso VIII, you can admire a row of **palaces** built with the return of the conquistadors from the New World when their coffers were heavy with riches.

■ Where to Stay

The **Parador de Cuenca** *($$$, Paseo de la Hoz del Huécar, ☎ 96 923 23 20, fax 96 923 25 34, cuenca@parador.es)* is large and imposing, set off on its own hill with the river gorge running between it and the old city. You can reach it from the town via the pedestrian bridge of San Pablo. Windows look directly across the expanse onto the Casas

Colgadas (others look onto the cloister). The rooms are decorated in a handsome, traditional style with lots of green to accent the calm neutral tones that are prevalent. Furnishings are comfortable and bathrooms are impeccably clean, modern and spacious. The *parador* was formerly the convent of San Pablo, built in the 16th century. The **Restaurante del Parador** *($$$)* specializes in local cuisine served in a main dining room that is long, narrow and elegantly appointed. House recommendations include roast game dishes (*asados*), *ajo mortero*, a purée of potatoes and codfish, and the *pisto con lomo de orza*, a dish of fried vegetables and pork-loin.

The **Pasada de San José** *($$, C/ Julián Romero 4, ☎ 96 921 13 00, fax 96 923 03 65, www.posadasanjose.com, d 50-60€)* is situated in a 17th-century building near the Catedral and was originally a choir school for boys. Twenty-two rooms have been renovated to accommodate travelers, with simple furnishings, tiled floors, whitewashed walls and views of the Huécar gorge. If making reservations (and you probably should in the high season), request *un cuarto con una terraza o un balcón*. That way you can sip your morning coffee in the privacy of your own fresh air while enjoying the views.

Hostal Residencia Castilla *(C/ Diego Jiménez 4, ☎ 96 922 53 57)* is not charming, old or even in the historical part of town. It is plain and affordable; the small rooms are equipped with televisions and full baths. What is lacking are windows – there aren't many. If you're riding the train, the location is ripe. If you plan on spending all of your time in the high old town, prepare for a 10-minute walk, there and back. Doubles 35€-40€.

Posada Huécar *(Paseo del Huécar 3, ☎ 96 921 42 01)* is in an old but recently refurbished home on the edge of the old city with the River Huécar running past it. Rooms are comfortable with lots of windows and admirable views. A double is 38€-42€.

El Mesón de Don Quijote *(C/ Francisco Costi 2, ☎ 96 718 02 00, www.mesondonquijote.com, d:55-65€)* is an old-timey place, dark and brooding like the Middle Ages. The rooms are cozy with a cottage feel – flagstone walls, exposed wood ceiling beams and iron beds. Their full bathrooms are bright and clean. Downstairs is the *restaurante*, which specializes in *cocina Manchega*, the cuisine of the region.

Camping

Caravaning Cuenca *(Ctra Ciudad Encantada, km 8, ☎ 96 923 16 56)* is eight km (five miles) west of Cuenca on the road to Ciudad Encantada, a prime attraction for eco-buffs in the area. This tree-shaded and grassy campsite can accommodate over 600 people, feed them in the restaurant, bathe them with hot water, then spit them out into a swimming pool that has a neat waterfall replica of a rock formation found in the nearby park. The campsite is open from Mar. 15-Oct. 13. Recently it was undergoing construction to add new facilities and private bungalows. Adults pay 3.50€ per night, plus 3€ for a tent space and that again for a car.

■ Where to Eat

Figón de Pedro *($$$, C/ Cervantes 15, ☎ 96 922 68 21)* comes highly recommended among the locals. A full meal will cost around 25€ per diner and consists of local classics: *morteruelo* (a wild game pâté); *perdiz estofada* (stewed partridge) and typical desserts, including *el alajú* (a sweet roll of almond, figs and honey).

To savor one of the finer dinner settings in Spain, consider eating at the restaurant inside the hanging houses of the Museo de Arte Abstracto, or at **Mesón Casas Colgadas** *($$$$, Conónigos, ☎ 96 922 35 09)*. There are two dining rooms, one on top of the other and, though the views over the gorge are special from both, the top floor views are super-duper special. Again, the cuisine is typically Manchegan, with an emphasis on roasts (*cuchinillo* is suckling pig and recommended here) and wild game such as *venado* (venison). A full-course meal could range from 25-35€ apiece.

For cheap eats in the town square, try **Plaza Mayor** *(Plaza Mayor 1, ☎ 96 921 14 96),* which offers outdoor seating and a three-course menu of the day for under 10€.

Eco-Travel

■ Parque Nacional de Las Tablas de Daimiel

On the starched plain above Ciudad Real, the Parque Nacional de Las Tablas de Daimiel was once an oasis of wetlands attracting great colonies of migratory birds. In 1966, its 1,928 hectares (4,764 acres) were declared a national reserve, about the same time that the rivers feeding it, the Guadiana, Cigüela and Záncares, were first being diverted through a series of irrigation canals and artesian wells for nearby agricultural use. In the 1970s Las Tablas was declared a National Park and, by the early 1980s, its shallow lagoons, known as *tablas*, were drying up, along with the rivers that fed them. In the ensuing years the shovelers, mallards, pollards and other ducks that made yearly appearances at the park grew fewer and fewer in number; in the meanwhile, the vineyards and corn farms continued to spread across the newly fertile plains, and still do. Park and governmental officials have been scrambling to restore the park, which is considered highly threatened.

The *ojos* (eyes) were emblematic of the area, natural pools springing up from the subterranean waters of the River Guadiana where it emerged north of the park. The area of the lagoon was traditionally a long and narrow arch of shallow water surrounded by reed beds and dotted with a number of islands. The *Isla de Pan* was the largest and most productive for viewing the ducks and other wintering birds, among them bearded tits, purple herons and the rare imperial eagle.

On the slightly higher and drier surfaces are scrublands known as *masiegales*, still plentiful despite the drought. Fertile valleys, known as *vegas,* claim the southern extremities of the park. On the exterior walls of the park's visitor center, a colored chart is posted detailing where to find the hides along the major walking routes. All are generally well marked.

Despite the threats, a trip here is not wasted. The area is still green for much of the year (in contrast to the rest of the region), the mountains of Toledo rise majestically to the north and in the winter the lagoon occasionally fills with water.

The **Centro de Visitantes**, at the entrance to the park, is open Wed.-Sun. 9 am-9 pm in the summer and 10 am-6 pm in the winter. It is closed Mon., Tues. and during holidays. Fishing, swimming, pets and straying from the marked trails are strictly prohibited. *(Apdo de Correos 3, 13250*

Daimiel, Ciudad Real, ☎ 92 669 31 18; centro Adiminstrativo, Paseo del Carmen, s/n, ☎ 92 685 10 97, daimiel@mma.es, www.mma.es/parques.)

Getting Here

The National Park of Las Tablas de Daimiel is in the Ciudad Real province of Castilla-La Mancha. There are no bus or train connections to the park. From **Madrid** it is 175 km (109 miles) to the park, via the N-IV. Heading south on this highway, you'll exit west on the N-420 about 20 km (12 miles) north of the park in the direction of **Daimiel**, the nearest town. From the city of **Ciudad Real**, the park is 35 km (22 miles) north on the N-430, also in the direction of Daimiel. The N-430 makes a bend around the western side of Daimiel; the exit for the park is well-marked with brown national park signs just northwest of the town. On it, head west for approximately 12 km (7½ miles).

Where to Stay

There are no campgrounds near the park. The closest town is the agricultural town of Daimiel, which has a nice long square, friendly people and plenty of restaurants and modest accommodations. ☆☆☆ **Hotel Las Tablas** *(C/ Virgen de las Cruces 5, ☎ 92 685 21 07, fax 92 695 32 64, www.domus-hoteles.es, hlastablas@domus-hoteles.es)* is a three-star hotel with doubles for 56€. The hotel ☆**Nueva Tierralllana** *(Ctra N-430, km 334, ☎ 92 685 27 63)* is west of town on the N-430 motorway. A double costs 28€.

■ La Serranía de Cuenca

In the northeast of the Cuenca province, the Serranía de Cuenca is a range of limestone mountains with an exciting array of gorges, swift rivers, rock faces studded with villages, flower-strewn meadows and a few less expected natural creations. Thick pine forests abound with wild boar and deer; neon-green moss covers the iron oxidized cliffs frequented by raptors. The **Cerro de San Felipe**, at 1,839 m (6,032 feet), is the highest peak in the range and snow-capped for much of the year. Exploring the area can be treacherous when the snow is heaviest from November to early March. With the snowmelt, a rich assortment of rare orchids begins to bloom; in the summer and fall, butterflies cloud the low skies.

The Júcar, Cuervo, Escabas and Guadiela rivers are, in places, a challenge to kayakers as they cut through narrow gorges, clear and abounding with otters. The **Hoz de Júcar** is the most imposing gorge (the lookout point of the **Ventana del Diablo** offers crisp views) and the Cuervo River the most frequented by river rats. A park within the range, the **Reserva Nacional de la Serranía de Cuenca**, is dedicated to the study and procreation of roe, fallow and red deer, as well as many endangered Spanish species.

A tall fence runs the perimeter of these 1,000 isolated hectares (2,800 acres), and access is restricted. Inside the fences the endangered brown bear, Spanish ibex and pardel lynx are bred. The strange geological forms in this park are perhaps its most enthralling features, with caves through which rivers materialize from underground mineral springs, waterfalls, weird and spectacular collections of rock formations and hot springs.

Outdoor Company

Club Deportivo Aire, Roca y Agua *(C/ Diego Jiménez 16, ☎ 69 901 61 40)*, in the city of Cuenca, organizes climbing, paragliding and canyoning excursions to the Serranía de Cuenca. Any of the three cost 30€ per person per day.

Getting Here & Away

By Bus: From the main bus station in Cuenca *(C/ Fermín Caballero 20, ☎ 96 922 70 87)*, buses depart once daily to and return from the villages of **Cañete**, **Beteta** and **Tragacete**.

By Car: From Cuenca by car, the CU-2105 (formerly the CU-921) cuts a loop through the park, accessing most of its popular areas.

Adventures on Foot

Twenty-seven km (16 miles) north of Cuenca on the CU-2105 is a mind-boggling exhibition of nature's forces. The **Ciudad Encantada**, the "enchanted city," is full of immense limestone blocks and boulders that have been eroded by wind and water into odd and at times familiar shapes. The privately owned, 2,000-hectare (5,600-acre) park is set within a black pine forest with well-marked trails leading through it and a parking lot for visitors (and there are usually a lot of visitors). The park is open 10 am-7 pm and costs 2€ to enter. Once inside, let your mind do the work. Is that rock over there a... no, it couldn't be... it is... well, at least... yeah, it looks like a dog. Besides El Perro, you may stumble across El Teatro (the theater), El Champignon (the mushroom), or El Puente Romano (the Roman bridge).

Adventures on Water

Farther along on the CU-2105 in the direction of the village of Beteta, you'll encounter signs for the **Nacimiento del Río Cuervo**. This is the point at which a mineral spring spits the Cuervo River through a cave and out into the open air. All along this river is beautiful scenery, but at this particular point you'll want to stay and float awhile in the shallow pools, admire the vivid green moss clinging to the ledges and the waterfalls that trickle soothingly into the clear river water.

The Cuervo eventually empties into the Tajo River. The **Centro de Actividades en la Naturaleza** in El Llano de los Conejos *(Ctra Comarcal 210, km 30, Cañamares, ☎ 96 931 01 28, www.ocioteca.com/elllanodelosconejos)* rents kayaks and guides rafting excursions to the area of the river. The downside is that their headquarters is a good hour north of the site in the town of Cañamares. From the Nacimiento del Río Cuervo you could continue on the CU-2105 to the village of **Beteta**, which is popular for its natural hot springs.

Where to Stay

With your own car, I'd recommend staying in the city of Cuenca (see the *Where To Stay & Eat* sections for Cuenca, pages220-21). Otherwise, there are a few scattered and affordable rural accommodations throughout the Serranía de Cuenca. Just outside the **Ciudad Encantada** is the affordable **Hostal-Restaurante Ciudad Encantada** *(☎ 96 928 81 94)*. In between Cuenca and Ciudad Encantada, **Montetur, S.L.** *(Ctra Ciudad Encantada, km 7, ☎ 96 914 01 64, fax 96 914*

00 96) rents small but comfortable cabins with heating, kitchens, television and full bathrooms. A four-person cabin costs 45-55€ and an eight-person cabin is 55-75€.

In **Cañete** the **Albergue Mayorazgo** *(Ctra N-420, km 499, Camino Chorreadero, s/n, ☎ 96 921 38 14)* is in a nice setting between the Rivers Laguna and Tinte. Bunk beds are the norm here. There is also a swimming pool and mountain bikes can be rented.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

In **Tragacete**, the modern **Posada San Felipe** *(C/ Río 2, ☎ 96 928 92 45, www.posadasanfelipe.net)* has pleasant rooms equipped with full bath for 35-40€ per night.

☆☆ **Hotel El Gamo** *(C/ Fernando Royuela, ☎ 96 928 90 11)* is also in Tragacete, rents standard rooms for 56€ per night. **Hostal El Gamo** *(C/ Fuente del Pino 2, ☎ 96 928 90 08)* is the cheaper alternative, offering clean rooms with bath for 35€ per night.

■ Parque Natural de las Lagunas de Ruidera

The flat land surrounding this natural oasis is emblematic of La Mancha, hot and dry enough to bake bread without an oven, bland enough to make the Parque Natural de las Lagunas de Ruidera a welcome sight for tourists eager to go swimming and for birds needing a rest. Twelve natural lakes connected like sausage links constitute the park, each fed by the next higher lake via subterranean rivers and above-ground feeds.

One can debate whether the park derives its name from the adventures of Don Quixote, during which a Mistress Ruidera, along with her children and nieces, are transformed into a series of lakes by a scrupulous magician, or from the noise (*ruido*) given off by the water running between them. The northernmost of these lakes, Laguna Cenagosa, lies 128 m (420 feet) below the southernmost lake, **La Blanca**. **Laguna Cenagosa** drains into the Guadiana River, which in turn drains (or should, were it not for the thirsty irrigation pumps along the way) into the national wetlands of Las Tablas de Daimiel to the west. With that precious wetland drying up, the clear-water lagoons of Ruidera have proven even more significant to wintering ducks and other waterfowl.

The two largest lakes in the chain are **Laguna del Rey** and **Laguna Gran Colgada**, both near the town of Ruidera, which is the main tourist hub in the area. From Ruidera, you can follow a road along the remaining lakes, each endowed with unique characteristics – **Batana**, **Santos Morcillo**, **Salvadora**, then the deep waters of the **Laguna Lengua**, circular **Redondilla**, highly developed **San Pedro** and finally to the marshy banks and woods surrounding **Laguna Conceja**.

From Laguna San Pedro, a road runs to the **Cueva de Montesinos**, which makes for a fun, exploratory diversion. **Natur Aventura** *(Ada de la Mancha 12, ☎ 92 625 15 73, www.naturaventura@airtel.net)*, based out of Ciudad Real, 40 km (25 miles) to the west, guides freshwater scuba-diving trips in the caves of Las Lagunas de Ruidera. The park information office, **Centro**

de Recepción, is in the town of Ruidera and open mornings and afternoons every day (☎ 92 652 81 16).

Getting Here

You can get close to the park via buses running from Ciudad Real and Albacete, but you'll need a car to explore the lagoons. The natural park is located on the N-430, midway between Ciudad Real in the west and Albacete in the east.

Where to Stay

For a relatively small town, Ruidera has accommodations out the kazoo, and more on the way. ☆☆ **Hotel Entrelagos** *(Ctra de las Lagunas, km 1, ☎ 96 252 80 22)* is in a prime location between the Lagunas del Rey and Colgada, with a boat dock and a beach accessible to patrons. A good double room with all the necessities runs 50€ per night.

Hostal La Colgada *(Ctra de Las Lagunas km 2, ☎ 96 252 80 25)* is a rather large hostel, with newly equipped rooms and balconies looking out over fresh, fresh, clean, clean water. Doubles are 39€.

Camping

Los Molinos *(N-430 Ciudad Real-Albacete, ☎ 92 652 80 89)* is next to the Laguna del Rey. This is a pretty, small campsite (if you have a large family, say 80 people, don't expect they'll have enough room) so make reservations during the hot summer months when all the Manchegans flock to the lagoons to cool their souls. A parcel is 6€ and includes the price of one adult, a tent space, and a car. Separately, an adult is 3.15€, a tent space is 2.70€ and a car is 2.70€.

Andalucía

"The weeping of the guitar,
begins.
The goblets of dawn,
Are smashed.
The weeping of the guitar,
Begins.
Useless,
To silence it.
It weeps monotonously,
As water weeps,
Over snowfields,
Impossible,
To silence it.
It weeps for distant,
Things."

The Guitar, Federico Garcia Lorca

A wash in earthen hues and white-washed villages, bathed in glorious sun, sounds of the flamenco, and imagery so exotic it borders on seductive, Andalucía is a world of adventures all its own. It is the birthplace of the bullfight, the guitar, flamenco music, and countless other fascinations lost in time. There is no right or wrong place or time to begin and end a trip here; choices for both the adventurous and the culturally curious are limitless. Ancient Arab influences pervade this landscape, from the magnificent Alhambra to the orange groves of La Mezquita, from the region's storied past to its bustling present – where grinning Moroccans stand in storefronts anxious to ply their wares as sleek Spanish businessmen walk past, where sun-seekers the world over crowd its beaches and thrill-seekers scour its challenging highs and lows.

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Andalucía is a land of extremes, with Spain's driest areas of Almería in the east and its rainiest, the Sierra de Grazalema, in the southwest. Five hundred miles of coastlines span Andalucía, of which roughly three-quarters are sandy beaches. These range from the less-touristed and less-developed Costa de la Luz along the Atlantic in the western realm, to the cheery resorts of the Costa del Sol, Costa de Almería, and Costa Tropical to the east. The fertile valley of the Río Guadalquivir separates Andalucía's two mountain ranges, the Sierra Moreno across the northern border, and the Cordillera Betica (with mainland Spain's highest peak, the Mulhacén in the Sierra Nevada) running southwest to east. The region is made up of the provinces of Cádiz, Córdoba, Jaén, Huelva, Almería, Málaga, Granada and Sevilla; together they comprise 60% of all the country's environmentally protected lands.

Traditionally the poorest of Spain's regions, and with its lowest employment rate, Andalucía is no longer the budget traveler's delight that it once was. Extremadura and parts of La Mancha take that honor. Instead it has translated its strong tourism industry into improvements and expansions of its tourism infrastructure; prices, not surprisingly, have risen to meet the demand. In cities like Sevilla, Córdoba and Granada, days spent wondering among the sights may seem like days spent at a state fair with their expensive ticket booths and endless crowds. Still, the monumental history of Andalucía cannot be understated and its prices for accommodations, food and drink remain lower than in most other Spanish regions and large cities. Moreover, the tourism side of Andalucía, paramount as it may be, is only a small feature of Spain's second-largest and most populous region.

This is a land of open spaces like none other in Spain. Cliffs, caves and wetlands stud the beaches of the Costa del Sol and the Costa de la Luz on the Mediterranean and Atlantic. Where the former may be terribly overdeveloped, the other is refreshingly underdeveloped, with empty stretches of beach, tough surf and, in the coastal town of Tárifa, incredible windsurfing conditions. Wildlife abounds high in its two mountain ranges and vast stretches of lowland solitude are prime territory for migratory birds, for a hike through the region's beloved white villages or for a climb in its gorge of El Chorro. Andalucía may well be the land of Spanish stereotypes, but it also transcends these norms in ways you will want to explore.

■ History

The first visitors to Andalucía were the Neanderthals, here somewhere around 50,000 years before you were born. It is believed their home was the Rock of Gibraltar. The region wouldn't see another serious visitor until 8000 BC, when the first North African tribes, the Iberians, arrived and established farming communities throughout. The Phoencians later developed trading posts along the coasts. The Cádiz seaport was founded in 1100 BC, making it the oldest known European city. Around 800 BC the Celts arrived from the north. Within a hundred years the Tartessus Kingdom was flourishing in Andalucía, and some years later Greek sailors founded trading ports along its shorelines. By 500 BC, the Carthaginians had effectively colonized southern Spain.

An ongoing clash with Carthage brought the invasion of the Romans in 206 BC, and they crushed the resistance of the native Iberians. Under the Romans, Andalucía prospered, becoming one of Rome's wealthiest and best-organized colonies. They called the land Betis, and connected the region with its first paved roads. Ships sailed up its largest river, the Guadalquivir, to Córdoba and returned to the Romans' homeland with olive oil and wines. Under Roman rule, Spain was Christianized and the Spanish language, the closest modern tongue to Latin, took root.

Dark ages and years of destitution and war followed the collapse of the Roman Empire. Barbarian tribes, headed by the Visigoths, swarmed in from the north and plundered the region. For two centuries southern Spain was laid to waste, hastening the arrival of Islamic warriors from Arabia and North Africa known as the Moors in 711 AD. These peoples associated the region with the Vandals, another barbarian tribe that, several centuries earlier had swept across the region, and they called it al-Andalus.

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to Ciudad Real
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Nerja
Motril
Cabo de Gata
COSTA DE LA LUZ
Cádiz
COSTA TROPICAL
Mediterranean Sea
San Fernando
Marbella
N-340
100 MILES
100 KM
COSTA DEL SOL
Gibraltar
Atlantic Ocean
Tarifa
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Andalucía

For eight centuries the Moors ruled the region, indelibly stamping it with their cultural legacy, as seen today in such monuments as the Mosque of Córdoba and the Alhambra Palace in Granada. It was at the Alhambra in 1492 that the Moors finally succumbed to the Christian Reconquest, nearly a hundred years after the Christians had seized the rest of Andalucía.

Under the Christians, the Andalucian port of Sevilla became the major port after the Guadalquivir River silted up and cut off Córdoba. Here, Columbus set sail on his fateful voyage to the Americas. During the 16th and 17th centuries Sevilla was the main port for the import of gold and other riches from the new world. Spain used its new wealth to wage wars under the Hapsburg monarchy against the Ottoman Turks in the Mediterranean and the Lutheran countries of northern Europe.

War and decreasing riches led Spain, and particularly Andalucía, into a steep economic decline. The region was further debilitated by the Spanish War of Succession in the early 18th century and, later, the Napoleonic invasion and Battle of Trafalgar, which hastened the War of Independence. The problems intensified as Andalucía suffered under the independence movement of South America through the rest of the 19th century.

With the loss of Spain's last colonies, the Philippines and Cuba, political instability and economic woes culminated in the ouster of the monarchy and the resulting Spanish Civil War in 1936. General Franco's Nationalist movement took control of the country, leading to disastrous effects for its people, including international blockades following the defeat of the Axis in World War II, which Spain had supported. In 1975, Franco's death brought about the restoration of democracy. The Spanish government was decentralized under the monarchy of King Juan Carlos II, and Andalucía was established as one of 17 autonomous regions in 1982, with its own regional administration, the Junta de Andalucía (Assembly of Andalucía). Since then, the high poverty levels of Andalucía have all but been eliminated, with modern infrastructure, roads, and health care established. Alternately the picture of prominence and destitution, Andalucía has slowly regained its persevering cultural significance.

Sevilla

Sevilla is the quietest big city in Spain, aloof, melancholy outside of festivals. She – for there is a subtle femininity to this city – is the leading lady in a country of swooning gentlemen and knows it; self-assured, imbued with a legacy of artists that found inspiration in glorifying her, Jews and Moors who shaped her graceful ambiance through custom and architecture, and Semana Santa, the Christian world's preeminent religious spectacle. "Sevilla is the most romantic Spanish city" is the bold, probably misguided, but nevertheless common refrain, to which is often added mention of Madrid or Barcelona by contrast. One falls prey after having walked along the Guadalquivir River at 10 in the evening and looked on the city twinkling at night or danced in the cool shadows of the Barrio de Santa Cruz, shared *tapas* at La Triana with strangers and carried on like old friends, been hypnotized by the flamenco, shocked by the bullfight.

Sevilla spawns flattery like the nearby Concha y Torro ranch does fighting bulls. It is one of a handful of cities people love to love and, if they don't, can't

help but wonder why. To urban Madrid, Sevilla is but a sleepy village; to euro-trashed Barcelona, it is an entirely different country.

■ History

"Sevilla is a Moorish lady with a Christian comb in her hair." So it goes. The Moors no doubt planted the seed of the city's splendor. Córdoba may be more oriental and Granada more monumental in this heritage, but Sevilla is a little of both in a setting of greater scale and diversity. Long before the Moors had come to control the Peninsula in the eighth century, the Romans founded Hispalis in 206 BC on this sight near the Guadalquivir River that had formerly been occupied by the Tartessions. The Vandals pushed the Romans out and in short course the Visigoths had pushed the Vandals out and established Hispalis as the capital of Visigothic Spain in 441 AD.

Under Moorish control, Sevilla came to be known as Ishbiliya. The city was overshadowed by the ruling Córdoba Caliphate until its fall in 1031, at which time Sevilla became the most powerful city under the Abbadid dynasty. The Abbadid's alliance with the Almoravids of Morroco helped temporarily quell the thrust of the northern Christian kingdom southward, but it also saw the dynasty lose much of its control of Al-Andalus to the Almoravids. By the 12th century, a new Moorish sect known as the Almohads had taken control of the region. During this time, Sevilla's mosque was built and would later serve as the foundation for the Christians' Catedral after they had won the city back in 1248.

Sevilla embarked on its golden age with the return of Columbus from the Indies in 1492, for which the city was awarded a monopoly on trade with the New World. The incoming foreign wealth corresponded with a burst of internal creativity. Painters like Velazquez, Murillo and Valdés Leal emerged, along with poets like Antonio Machado and the great sculptors Pedro Roldán and Martínez Montañés. The written word followed suit. Don Juan, the precocious romantic, arose from the spirit of Sevilla and later the operatic heroine Carmen met Don Jose outside the city's tobacco factory. Cervantes' Don Quixote had also begun his great quest in Sevilla.

Nativity (1460s), terracotta, Sevilla Catedral

In the ensuing years, the city's preeminence as Spain's "gateway to the New World" waned. The River Guadaluquivir was silting in and Cádiz, more appropriately situated on the coast, took over port duty. A 17th-century plague wiped out over half of the city's population and for the next 200 years Sevilla was content to stem the tide of her own disarray.

Great things were expected of the Ibero-American Exposition that Sevilla would host in 1929. The city was beautified, hotels and exposition palaces were built alongside expansive and beautiful parks and then the Civil War began its first slow, guttural rumblings. The city's governors, acting perhaps more prudently than many others, surrendered the city almost immediately to Franco's forces. Many of the Sevillanos were thankful they had endured only a small massacre of about 8,000 people.

With the newly established constitutional monarchy in the early '80s, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) came to power with Sevilla's own Felipe González Márquez at the head. Gonzalez served as the premiere of Spain until the Partido Popular won out under Jose María Aznar in 1996; in the meanwhile, Sevilla had enjoyed vast urban improvements due to its hosting of the 1992 World Expo and, what with the tourism boom and the history and inherent romance, the city only looks back to savor the future.

■ Orientation

There is no need to set foot on an urban bus. Sevilla is a walker's city, and many of its attractions are approachable only in this manner. The **River Guadalquivir** and the **Torre de Giralda** serve as useful landmarks. The river runs north-south through the city with most of the tourist sights located on its east side. Here, the **Torre de Giralda** can't be missed, soaring above Sevilla's famous **Catedral**. The **Barrio de Santa Cruz**, the favorite neighborhood that was the old Jewish quarter, spreads east from the Catedral and the **Alcázar** next to it.

North of this area is **El Centro**, a pedestrian shopping zone that fills and empties to the hours of old and new boutiques and department stores. West of the Catedral but still on the east bank of the Guadalquivir is the historical **Arenal** neighborhood highlighted by the city's **Plaza de Toros** (bullfighting arena). From here the **Torre del Oro** (Tower of Gold) can be spotted farther south on the bank. The **Paseo de Colón** that runs along this side of the river is a popular area for evening walks or *paseos*. From here, the west side of the river is best reached by the **Puente de Isabel II Triana** or to the south by the **Puente San Telmo**. These bridges lead to the traditional *barrio* of gypsies and fishermen known as **Triana**, a working neighborhood of flamenco and *tapas*. North of it is the **Isla de la Cartuja** and the many buildings built for the **Expo '92,** a site the city has had trouble putting to good use since then.

■ Useful Information

Tourism Offices

Sevilla's main tourism office *(Avda Constitución 21, ☎ 95 422 14 04)* is just south of the Catedral on the avenue that runs by it. It is usually packed and, as a result, the staff is good for a city map and not much more. The other tourism office *(Plaza de Triunfo 1, ☎ 95 450 10 01)* across the plaza from the Catedral entrance, however, is somewhat hidden, less crowded and much more helpful.

Tour Options

Both **Sevilla Tour** *(☎ 90 210 10 81, www.citysightseeing-spain.com)* and **Tour por Sevilla** *(☎ 95 456 06 93, sevirama.cjb.net)* offer street tours on double-decker open-air buses with a short walking gig included. Tickets can be purchased at the tourism office or on the buses and are valid for 24 hours. Just hop on or off at one of the frequent stops whenever you're tired of listening to the headphone tour guide. The main launching pad is at the Torre del Oro. Here you can also catch the **Cruceros Turísticos** boats *(Paseo Marqués del Contadero, s/n, ☎ 95 456 16 92, 5€)* that leave every 30 minutes and float up the river to the Isla de La Cartuja. On Sundays from May to October another boat travels down the Guadalquivir to the river mouth at Sanlúcar *(info ☎ 95 456 16 92)*.

You can catch a **horse-drawn carriage** for a clicking, clacking tour across town (along with the occasional nose-pinching whiff). These tend to stack up around the Cathedral in the Plaza de Triunfo and cost around 5€ for a short ride.

Leonardo *(Avda de la Constitución, ☎ 62 054 11 02, 36€)* offers guided walking tours along various routes: monumental, palace, the Jewish neighborhood, etc. You could rent a scooter from **RentaMoto** *(C/ Padre Méndez Casariego 17, ☎ 95 441 75 00, www.rentamoto.net)*, but I probably wouldn't.

Important Contacts

Taxis: ☎ *95 462 22 22, 95 467 55 55, 95 458 00 00*

Post Office: *Avda de la Constitución 32, ☎ 90 219 71 97*

Police: National *(Avda Blas Infante, ☎ 95 428 93 00 or 091)*; Local *(Avda América Vespucio 35, ☎ 95 446 72 11 or 092)*

Fire Dept.: ☎ *080*

Lost and Found: *C/ Diego de Riaño 3, ☎ 95 421 50 64*

Health Emergencies: ☎ *061 or 95 422 22 22*

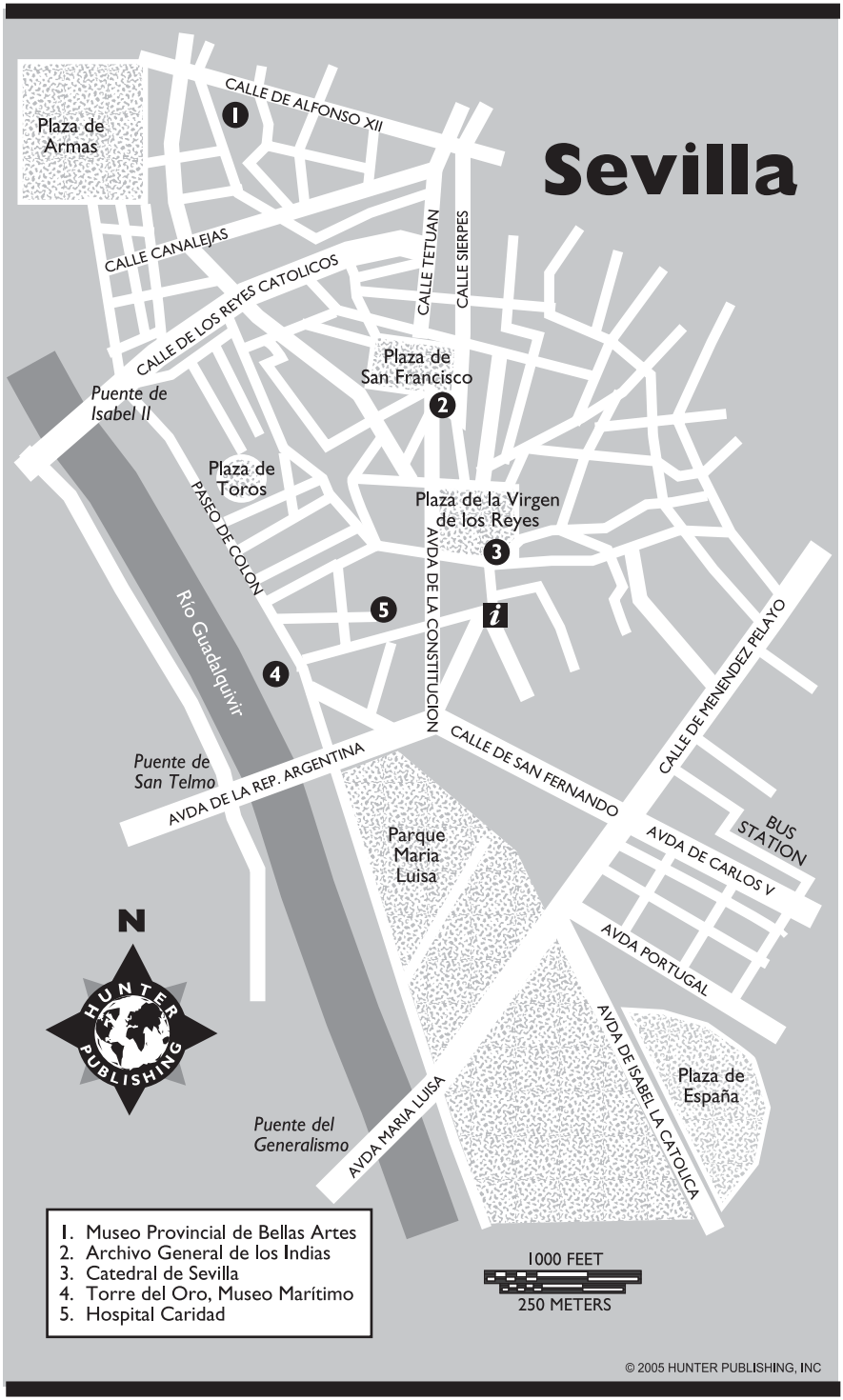
Red Cross: ☎ *95 435 78 61*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: Train tickets can be bought at **Estación Santa Justa** *(Avda Kansas City, s/n, ☎ 95 453 76 26)* or at the **RENFE** office *(C/ Zaragoza 31, open 9 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm)*. This huge train station is about one km (.6 mile) east of Sevilla's historical center. To get into the center, flag a taxi or take bus #32 to Plaza de la Encarnación. Service includes: **Madrid** (2½ hours) via **Córdoba** (45 min.) on the high-speed AVE train (up to 15-20 per day); **Granada** (three hours), **Cádiz** (two hours), **Málaga** (2½ hours), **Cáceres** (six hours), **Valencia** (nine hours). Trains run Mon.-Fri. to **Barcelona** (12+ hours).

By Bus: The bus station, Estación El Prado de San Sebastián *(Plaza de San Sebastián, s/n, ☎ 95 441 71 11)* serves mostly Andalucía. The station is southeast of the Catedral at the corner of Avda de Carlos V and Avda Menéndez y Pelayo. The Jardines de Murillo separate it from the Alcazar and the city center to the west. Multiple daily buses to: **Córdoba** (two hours), **Cádiz** (1½ hours), **Jerez de la Frontera** (two hours), **Tárifa** (3¼ hours), **Algeciras** (3½ hours), **Málaga** (2½ hours), **Marbella** (2½ hours), **Ronda** (three hours), **Granada** (3¼ hours) and **Almería** (7½ hours). The **Estación Plaza de Armas** *(Cristo de la Expiración, s/n, ☎ 95 490 77 37)* connects to areas outside of Andalucía. It is located next to the River Guadalquivir near the Cachorro bridge (Puente del Cachorro) and has daily buses to: **Madrid** (six hours), **Valencia** (10 hours), **Barcelona** (12-15 hours), **Cáceres** (4½ hours) and **Salamanca** (10 hours).

By Car: Though congested, the loop around Sevilla facilitates getting in or out of town by car. If coming from **Madrid** the quickest path is south on the N-IV, which passes through **Córdoba** along the way. The A-92 runs east to **Granada** where, along the way you can exit south on the N-331 to reach **Málaga**. The A-4 carries south to **Cádiz**. To reach **Mérida** and **Cáceres**, take the N-630 north.



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■ Sightseeing

"The great Babylon of Spain: a 'home from home' of all nations."
Louis de Góngora*, The Barrio de Santa Cruz*

It is the ideal Andalucían neighborhood, the former Jewish quarter abutting the Catedral and Alcázar. It is a web of cobbled streets sided by whitewashed walls that are cool to the touch and far too narrow for vehicular traffic. It is diminutive plazas littered with the leaves of orange trees, balconies crowded with lavender and bougainvillea. Old palaces have been converted into hotels, lesser quarters into hostels, and they alternate with small specialty shops and restaurants rarely identified by more than a discrete ceramic tiling.

La Catedral

Were it not that Sevilla's cathedral is large enough to swallow the city's skyline, some enterprising Spaniard might have already devised a system by which to charge people just to gaze upon this architectural wonder from the Plaza de Triunfo. It is a holy sight, Gothic spires so numerous a mathematician would enjoy trying to count them, flying buttresses bracing and bracing and bracing and the proud Giralda Tower with a hundred sets of eyes staring out of it upon the city. A 15th-century canon, in contemplating the Catedral's construction, is widely reputed to have said, "We shall make a cathedral so immense that everyone on beholding it will take us for madmen." Only Saint Peter's church in the Vatican and Saint Paul's in London are larger.

The Catedral was completed in 1507 on the sight of the city's Arabic mosque, which had served as a church as late as the 15th century until it was deemed an eyesore. Upon entering the Catedral, the **Patio de Los Naranjos** opens up with rows of citrus trees fed by a series of canals, a common irrigation system employed by the Moors which you will find aplenty in Granada's Alhambra. This "cloister" is one of the only remaining elements of the original mosque and is said to have been the site where Moors would perform ablutions, glorified baths meant to purify the spirit. Its walls are inscribed with lines from the Koran and at its center is a Visigoth fountain in which saints were once baptized. Look up and notice the hanging wooden crocodile, which represents a live crocodile given to King Alfonso X from the Sultan of Egypt, whose daughter he had requested in marriage.

One might well miss all this as the tower in the corner immediately demands attention. Rising 97m (318 feet), the **Torre de Giralda** is the other link to the original mosque. When the Moors relinquished the city and sought permission to deconstruct their prized monument, Prince Don Alonso remarked, "If only one brick were removed from that tower the Moors would all be stabbed to death." It was one of the world's tallest towers when it was built in

1184 and other renditions of it can still be found throughout northern Africa, where its architect was often commissioned to repeat the feat. A series of ramps, not stairs, wind up between the inner and outer towers accommodating the ghosts of ancient sultans and muezzins, who once rode their horses to the top.

Be prepared – when the bells ring that once called the faithful to prayer, eardrums verge on explosion. The 25 bells were added in the 16th century, each with its own name. Crowning (as well as extending) the tower is a Renaissance addition from the rich years of conquest, atop which spins Giraldillo, the bronze weather vane shaped like a beautiful woman.

The Catedral's **Capilla Mayor** (main chapel) has amazing grillwork by Fray Francisco, but is remarkable for its Gothic **Retablo Mayor** (high altar); in fitting with the prevailing theme of the cathedral, it is said to be the largest altarpiece in the Christian world and took a succession of Flemish and Spanish artists over a half-century to complete in 1564. The amount of gold incorporated into this work could feed a small African nation. Over 1,000 figures are carved in the relief panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ.

Just around the corner is the **Sepulcro de Cristóbal Colón**, a simple but imposing marble sarcophagus said to house the remains of the Western world's most famous explorer. The sculptured pall-bearers represent the original four Christian kingdoms of Aragón, Castilla, León and Navarra. The inscription next to the tomb describes how Columbus' remains were delivered to Sevilla from Havana, Cuba when that country became independent, some 300 years after the explorer's death. Hmm. Needless to say, there is considerable doubt that Columbus is actually in there.

On the eastern side of the cathedral is the **Capilla Real** (royal chapel), its centerpiece a 13th-century statue of the Virgen de los Reyes. King San Fernando, upon seeing a vision of this Virgin that told him he would conquer Sevilla, commissioned the piece to be created. With nothing to go on other than the King's memory, it took a number of tries (and artists) to get it right. The glass urn before the altar contains this Castilian King's remains.

The Catedral's **treasury** is housed in a number of rooms that are the plateresque sacristies south of the main chapel near the exit. Found within is the priceless, jewel-laden crown known as the Corona de la Virgen de los Reyes, masterworks by Sevillanos such as Murillo and Pedro de Campaña, various relics pertaining to Corpus Christi and the city's keys, gifted to Fernando III after he'd claimed Sevilla from the Moors in 1248. *(Plaza Virgen de Los Reyes, ☎ 95 421 49 71, open Mon.-Sat. 11 am-5 pm, Sun. and holidays 2:30 to 6 pm; entry 6€, 1.5€ students and seniors; entrance through Plaza de Virgen de los Reyes via Puerta del Lagarto.)*

Real Alcázar

A myriad of closed and open spaces designed for war and royalty with battlement walls, palaces empting into patios and gardens connected by lavish halls or ornate gateways. It is the Alhambra's little sister, a monument of delicate Moorish artistry at its core, a vision of architecture and styling that was frequently reinterpreted through Christian eyes. In 931 the fortified palace was built to house and protect the Moorish governors.

What we see today are largely renovations and additions created under the Christian Monarchy. King Pedro I had the largest hand in reshaping the

compound; his requirements, surprisingly, went far in respecting the Mudéjar styling. Later, during the Renaissance, it was further expanded under Carlos V, though he refrained from debauching the fortress as some believe he had the Alhambra.

The Alcázar is one of few remaining wondrous escapes into the vanished world of Al-Andalus. It reflects a rare symmetry, perhaps a compromise, between these two cultures that were colliding during its ongoing construction.

After entering in the **Patio de la Montería** where the Almohad palatial façade presents itself for admiration, a cursory glance at the surroundings (around every corner is a surprising new and different blend of architecture) does call to mind the Alhambra. The two are closely linked in styling with their intricate stucco modeling, brilliant Moorish tile work and patios echoing with the sounds of water fountains and rippling ponds throughout. Skilled Moorish workers from the Alhambra were delivered to Sevilla when King Pedro – known alternately as the Just or the Cruel, depending on the experiences of those who lived under his rule – initiated construction of his Palacio de Don Pedro here in the 14th century.

The palace's **Patio de Las Doncellas** (Patio of the Maids) is a square, but far from boring with its fanciful arcade and balconies all carefully tiled and cast. Adjoining it is the **Patio de la Muñecas** (Patio of the Dolls) and close by the **Salón de Ambajadores** (Ambassadors' Hall), formerly the throne room and captivating with its wooden honeycomb dome the color of wheat.

After the Moors had been routed from Sevilla and everywhere else in Spain and had holed up in Granada, the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel plotted their moves from the Alcázar and later allegedly met with Columbus upon his return from the New World. The rooms (today those off the Patio de la Montería), royal courts and halls of the Alcázar still serve as a Royal residence, as they have for six centuries.

In exiting the palace, as in touring it, cool, blooming gardens serve as a peaceful respite, and no more so than when the blistering Sevillano summer awaits *(Plaza de Triunfo, ☎ 95 450 23 23, open Tues.-Sat. 9:30 am-5 pm, Sun. and holidays 9:30 am-1:30 pm; entry 5€, free for students.)*

Along the Guadalquivir

To the north of the city, the great river that once carried ancient Phoenician ships well beyond Córdoba had silted up. The dawn of Spain's golden age found Sevilla, with her port still functioning thanks to the dredging that had connected her to the Guadalquivir, perfectly situated to reap the bounty of the New World that would arrive at her banks. During these glory days it was declared, "If Madrid is the capital of Spain then Sevilla is the capital of the world!" From here Columbus set sail in 1492 and when he returned a year later, ships laden with exotic plants, spices and natives, Sevilla earned the monopoly on trade in the New World; its Council of the Indies was charged with governing the new lands, while the Casa de Contratación established by Felipe II in the Casa Lonja oversaw commerce.

This latter building, situated between the Catedral and the Alcázar, was converted into the **Archivo General de Las Indias** during the 18th century. It is recognized as the greatest depository of information obtained during the four centuries of Spanish colonialism in the New World. Maps of newly discovered oceans and continents (many of which are inaccurate), letters of correspondence to the crown and first-hand accounts of the New World are a draw for scholars from around the world. And they're still discovering documents that could rewrite history. Admission is free to view displays of the most easily recognized documents, but academicians are the only ones who can examine the rest of the hundreds of thousands of pages. Even if you understood Spanish, you'd have a hard time deciphering the colloquial prose. But man how those writers could keep a line of text straight without the help of college-ruled paper!

Thousands of Spanish galleons arrived via the Guadalquivir with riches gained by Pizarro in Peru, Córtez in Mexico and others, unloading their hauls in the **Torre de Oro** (Tower of Gold), shown at left. New institutions were created, including a university, monasteries and a royal prison. Sevilla flourished. The 12-sided tower had been built by the Moors in 1220 during the waning years of the Almohad as part of the city's defensive wall. Its name may have come from the gold that once tiled its roof and shone brightly in the sun, or because it was once a mint of sorts. Or, because King Pedro I had once confined the wife of one of his leading soldiers, she a beauty with golden-blond hair, in the tower until her husband returned home from battling the Moors. The original defensive system included a similar tower on the opposite bank of the river. The Moors once ran a massive chain between the towers in order to control the use of the river.

Now the tower houses the **Museo Marítimo** *(Paseo de Colón, s/n, ☎ 95 422 24 19, open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm, entry 1€)*, a naval museum with antique nautical devices, mounted fishies, model boats and sketches of Sevilla's port when it was thriving. Once the wealth of the New World had been carelessly siphoned off to other countries and the years of exploration had reached their zenith, the River Guadalquivir, as if in a gesture of acquiescence, began to silt up more seriously around Sevilla. From the

17th century on, Cádiz, farther south on the Atlantic Coast, would serve as the main port. Were it not for dredging, Sevilla's stretch of the river would today be wholly unapproachable by boat.

If you're into carriages, consider visiting the **Museo de Carruajes** *(Convento de Los Remedios, Plaza de Cuba, s/n, ☎ 95 427 26 04 open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm, entry 3€)* on the west side of the river, which houses every imaginable variation of the land craft, from simple but sturdy country carriages, to fancy urban ones and others used for hunting or sport outings.

The Arenal District

Farther north along the banks of the Guadalquivir is Sevilla's "Cathedral of Bullfighting," the 18th-century **Plaza de Toros Maestranza** *(Paseo de Colón, ☎ 95 422 45 77, open 9:30 am-2 pm and 3-7 pm, on days of bullfight 9 am-3 pm; entry plus guided tour 3€)*. Writers Lope de Vega and Cervantes were taken with this area in the days when its reputation as a "mariners' neighborhood" was giving way to its reputation as a "bullfighters' neighborhood." The bullring is one of Spain's two most celebrated, the other being in Ronda. Both maintain the country's best bullfighting schools. The bullring took over 100 years to complete. To walk through its iron Prince's Gate is a lifelong goal of many an aspiring bullfighter. Here the revered bullfighter Juan Belmonte (born just outside of Sevilla) began to revolutionize the sport. Hemingway said he could "wind a bull around him like a belt." Rather than rely on fancy footwork to evade the charging bull (as had been the method used until then), Belmonte remained motionless and allowed the careful manipulation of his cape to deceive the bull into rushing past.

The season begins on Easter Sunday. Weekly fights become daily spectacles during the Fería de Abril and Corpus Christi, before the season ends in September with the Fería de San Miguel. Tickets range from 7€ to 110€ and can be purchased at the arena at least a few days in advance, or at one of the ticket offices on C/ Sierpes or Tetuán. Scalpers will be on hand as well. The guided tour passes through the bullfighting museum and the chapel, where it is traditional for bullfighters to say a prayer before departing to slay a bull (that is, if all goes as planned).

Across from the bullring on the opposite side of Paseo de Cristobal Colón you'll notice the statue of Carmen de La Cigarrera (Carmen the cigarette girl), whose fictional presence pervades the city and the writing on it. Carmen was the heroine of a story written by the French writer Prosper Merimée. It was later turned into an operatic phenomenon when it was reinterpreted by Georges Bizet and first staged in 1875. In this version, Carmen, a poor gypsy girl, works in Sevilla's **Fábrica de Tabacos**, not in Arenal but near the Plaza de España *(C/ San Fernando; entry free)*, where she meets and captivates Don Jóse. When originally built in the 18th century, this neoclassical tobacco factory was Spain's second-largest structure after the Monastery of El Escorial near Madrid. Now it houses part of Sevilla's university. Carmen was murdered by Jóse on the site of the statue while a great bullfight was underway and the roar of the crowd drowned out the heroine's pleas, or so the story goes.

Hospital de la Caridad

The financier of this church/hospital, Don Miguel de Mañara, may or may not have served as the inspiration for Spanish dramatist Tirso de Molina's fanci-

ful play *El Burlador de Sevilla*, more commonly known as *The Seducer of Sevilla* and, moreover, as the play that introduced the enduring fictitious romantic Don Juan. It is said the founder was a playboy and the early death of his beautiful wife and an unhealthy lifestyle hastened his turning point – when supposedly Mañara emerged from a lascivious ball into a vision of his own funeral procession. Whatever his motivations, Mañara did seek to reverse his fortunes; he joined and became head of the Santa Carídad Brotherhood (Brotherhood of Charity) and in 1672 founded this charity hospital, a handsome white Baroque affair trimmed in ocher tones.

What may seem lighthearted outside delves into the fatalistic once you are inside. The main Baroque altarpiece by Sevillano Pedro Roldán is a shining gold beauty and a heartfelt nod to the "seventh work of compassion," the burying of Christ. Paintings by Murillo depict the sick being tended, while painter Valdéz Leal preferred to render the morbid results of infirmity. The body in flesh gives way to frightening skeletons casting a leery gaze. If you need a respite from it all, move into open air the double courtyard, plain white and trimmed in yellow. The burial place of the original Don can then be visited in the Iglesia de San Jorge, which he founded in 1674. *(C/ Temprado 3, ☎ 95 422 32 32, open Mon.-Sat. 9 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm, Sun. 9 am-1 pm; entry 3€.)*

Plaza de España

This semicircular plaza was built as part of a widespread city beautification project in anticipation of the Ibero-American exposition, which Sevilla would host in 1929. The half-moon-shaped edifice shadowing it wraps for over 200 m (640 feet) between twin towers. It is mostly brick and decorated with ceramic friezes dedicated to Spain's provinces. A moat ripples in front, connected to the inner plaza by a series of gently arching pedestrian bridges. Rowboats can be rented to ply its waters from morning to evening. With nightfall, the central fountain next to the moat becomes an entertaining spectacle of alternating shapes and colors.

Parque de María Louisa

The Plaza looks out on the Parque de María Louisa *(Avda de María Louisa, s/n)*, also created for the exposition on lands that had been previously donated by the child Princess Louisa Fenanda de Orleans in 1893. It is a pleasure to lie in the shade of the park's trees, maybe magnolia, orange or palm, and watch young Spaniards kick around a soccer ball until it gets lodged in one of the canopies and must be retrieved. Don't hesitate to join in or, if you're flat footed and a good aim, bring a Frisbee. Lovers prefer to lie around and listen to the fountains or pluck rose petals. In the square dedicated to the poet Gustavo Adolfo Becquer is a statue perfectly suited to them; it depicts three young women, each in a posture representing a different stage of love, sweet and bitter love.

The **Plaza de América** at the park's south end presents a cluster of pavilions of different architectural styles (plateresque, Mudéjar, Gothic). These were built for the exposition and now house various novelty exhibitions and museums. The largest of these pavilions, formerly devoted to fine arts, is now Sevilla's **Museo Arqueológico Provincial** *(Plaza de América, s/n, Parque de María Luisa, ☎ 95 423 24 01, open Tues. 3-8 pm, Wed.-Sat. 9 am-8 pm, Sun. 9 am-2 pm, entry 1.50€, students free)*. On display is ancient Iberian

jewelry, Phoenician sculptures such as that of the god Astarte, Roman relics that have been retrieved from nearby Italíca, as well as others from the little-known Tartessos civilization. The **Museo de Artes y Costumbres Populares** *(Pabellón Mudéjar, Plaza de América, ☎ 95 423 25 76)* is nearby and houses an oddball assortment of traditional outfits, and furniture dating from the 18th and 19th century. It also hosts workshops devoted to traditionally Spanish crafts, such as flamenco, guitar gluing and rug weaving.

Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes

This is a fine art museum that pays credit to the notable Sevillan painter Valdéz Leal and his peers Murillo and Zurbarán, as well as to the work of other Spanish schools of the Siglo de Oro (Golden Age). The portrait of "Jorge Manuel," was painted by the model's father, El Greco. The museum was founded in 1839 in this, the former Convent of Merced Calzada. Some say its representation of Spanish painters is eclipsed only by that of the Prado. *(Fine Arts Museum, Plaza del Museo 9, ☎ 95 422 07 90, open Tues. 3-8 pm, Wed-Sat. 9 am-8 pm, Sun. 9 am-2 pm; entry 3€.)*

Semana Santa

During the festivities of Holy Week a devout spell is cast over the city of Sevilla. For a week beginning with Palm Sunday and ending the following Easter Sunday, as the *azahar* (orange blossoms) bloom and permeate everything with their smell, the Catholics dress in their finest attire and fill the city. They watch procession after procession filter slowly through narrow ways and alleys, sometimes respectfully silent, other times singing a song of prayer known as a *saeta*, as they pay homage to Christ the Savior and the Virgin Mary en route to the Catedral.

Semana Santa is the world's most elaborate religious celebration, dating at least to the 15th century and likely before, when the festivities served as a means of relaying the Gospel to a largely illiterate public. It acquired its present form in the later centuries as new floats and brotherhoods were introduced. Each church parish is represented by its *hermandade*, or brotherhood, whose duties during the week consist of leading two effigies, one of Jesus and the second of the Virgin Mary shaded beneath a canopy, from their church to the Catedral, a process that can take up to 12 hours. These *nazarenos*, as the members of the confraternity are known, occasionally number in the thousands, wearing tunics that reach to the ground and pointed hoods that reach toward the sky, each in a color representing their respectful church parish, be it purple, black, white or a combination of colors. The outfits are not unlike those once worn by heretics damned by the Inquisition.

Through the streets they follow a large cross known as the *cruz de guía* (guiding cross), carrying candles or smaller wooden crosses over their shoulders. The effigies, known as *pasos*, highlight each procession. They are the ornate floats of Jesus or Mary made of wood and silver, some weighing almost a ton and dating back hundreds of years. As many as 30 or 40 *costaleros* are concealed beneath them as they bear the float through town, each man among

them supporting up to 40 kilos (88 lbs) on his shoulders, swaying in rhythm to the music of bands trailing behind or marching in step silently. These were formerly dockworkers who carried the *pasos* in return for cash, but now they are young, sturdy men seeking only deliverance. You will see them from time to time step out from underneath the float to catch a breath once it has been halted at a cross-street to let the crowds pass. Atop their heads and shoulders is a sack filled with sawdust and dirt that serves as their only padding. One man, known as the *capataz*, is responsible for leading, stopping and starting each grand procession.

The 57 brotherhoods represent a variety of groups. *Los Estudiantes* is comprised of mostly students and charged with carrying one of the city's most admired crucifixes, *El Cristo de La Buena Muerte* by Juan de Mesa. *El Baratillo* is devoted to bullfighters because of that parish's proximity to the Plaza de Torros. *La Borriquita's* processions are made by children, while *La Hermandad de Gitanos* is traditionally a gypsy affair. Each procession arrives at the head of Calle Sierpes, where it will begin the *carrera official*, through this street, the Plaza San Francisco with the city hall and from there on to the Catedral where, once inside, the effigy is blessed.

By Good Friday of *La Madruga* the celebrations have begun to reach their crescendo. The beautiful women of Sevilla are still wearing the mantillas from the day before in mourning of Christ's death (an elegant black dress and a tortoiseshell comb worn in the hair over which is draped a laced veil). Effigies begin to emerge with the processions of *Gran Poder* and later *Los Gitanos* and *La Macarena*, whose beautiful virgin is emblematic in its realism and weeps crystal tears. On romantic Saturday fewer processions are made, the most notable that of *El Cristo del Cachorro* crossing the Triana Bridge and *La Sagrada Mortaja*, which makes its approach in the dark. Nuns sing to the virgins and as midnight approaches and the celebrations draw to a symbolic close. Only the brotherhood of the resurrection remains to make its procession and return on Easter Sunday.

Free programs detailing the exact days and timing of the processions can be found all over town – in tourist offices, hotels, stores and, often, lying on the ground. Some of the bleacher seating is reserved; in others you'll be able to sit and watch the procession without having to peer over a sea of 300 heads for a price of 5€ or more. It's best to approach one of the gate attendants well before a procession is set to begin, and consider wearing nice clothes. Otherwise you'll stand out and maybe draw dirty looks from the Spaniards who are in the habit of showing their respect to the religion in as many ways as possible during this week, one of which is by dressing properly. As for how to act, just follow the example of the Spaniards; sometimes it is appropriate to remain silent, other times it isn't. And don't forget to try the typical sweets of holy week for sale throughout the city.

The Ku Klux Klan borrowed their look from the hoods worn by the brotherhoods during the processions of Semana Santa.

■ Shopping

El Centro is usually shopper's destination *numero uno*. Contemporary stores *de moda*, or in style, outnumber the old-timey stores by a good margin. The main streets are **Sierpes**, **Tetúan** and those that trail off from them. Here you'll be able to buy a new pair of skivvies or dancing shoes as well as traditional cooking utensils, foreign language books at the **Casa del Libro** and pretty much anything at one of the two **El Corte Inglés** department stores. Occasionally, you'll see one of those little shops tourists love to go googly-eyed over, selling fans, guitars, flamenco outfits. For the first, try C/ Pérez 58, where **Esther Amo's** traditional fans are on display and sale. Fans are less a trend than a necessity in the Sevillan summer and you'll find one hand-painted to suit every taste, from scenes of bullfights to the cityscape to abstract shapes and plain ones that cost only a couple of euros but still work. **Guitarras de Artesanía Valeriano Bernal** *(C/ Hernando del Pulgar 20)* sells custom-made flamenco and classical guitars. If you play, consider buying a guitar somewhere in Andalucía rather than Madrid, where the famous manufacturers like Ramírez are located. Prices are better and often times the *guitarrero* is on hand to field questions or play a little ditty. You can buy a cheapie for as little as 100€, but it will no doubt have a laminated top and ornery tuners and may even have been made in China. Ask. Both **Modas Muñoz** *(C/ Cerrajería 5)* and **Tienda Flamenco Sevilla** *(C/ Cuna 46)* specialize in traditional dancing outfits, sexy high-heeled shoes, the frilly *mantoncillos* (flamenco scarves) and the slender, poca-dotted flamenco dresses that fall or fly into layer after layer of sultry ruffles. To complete the ensemble, music is necessary. **Compás Sur** *(Cuesta del Rosario 7, Plaza de la Pescadería)* is a music store in love with flamenco and Andalucían music.

The area around the **Catedral** and the **Barrio de Santa Cruz** is full of shops oriented toward the tourist, with guidebooks, key chains, cheap porcelains and the like. For accomplished ceramic work, **Triana** and **Los Remedios** is the place to go, with frequent outdoor **ceramic markets** and stores displaying luminous tile mosaics or tiny painted statues. **Carmen, "cerámica de triana"** *(C/ Callao 8)*, specializes in this art but is a little pricey compared to what you can find on the streets or in mom & pop stores. For affordable custom-made jewelry, clothing and leather crafts, the Plazas Duque and Magdalena have **open-air markets**. There is also a **flea market** every Thursday that spreads around C/ de la Fería.

■ Nightlife

ENTERTAINMENT

Pick up the entertainment guide ***El Giradillo*** at tourism offices. It lists all the action for arts and entertainment throughout the city each month.

In certain streets and plazas of Sevilla, as the night begins, crowds of young people gather for the city's famous *botellónes*, slang for impromptu street parties. Warm 40-oz bottles of the locally brewed Cruz Campo beer are passed around and glasses of sangria are dipped from large, communal clay jars as the smell of hash streams from *purros* (Spanish joints rolled with tobacco). The smell permeates the air, along with the sound of handmade conga drums. Since most of the revelers in the *botellón* are still too young or broke to bother with the bar and club scenes, these parties are known to carry on until dawn, often enraging nearby residents, who are forced to listen all night long, then must clean up the trash in the morning. Despite increasing efforts by the police to put a stop to the festivities, they continue, and nowhere more so than in Sevilla. Two popular areas to break the law in this way are listed below, along with some nearby bars where drinking and socializing is more appropriate, and legal.

El Capote (C/ Arjona s/n) is a zone and also a bar on the banks of the River Guadiana near the Puente de Isabell II Triana (known as the Puente de Triana for short). Cheapos flock to the area for the previously described debacle, while the sophisticated (anything is sophisticated compared to the *botellón*) crowd the bar's terrace to drink in the views of the river and the city colored in night-lights. The place stays open late and live music is often on the menu.

The other zone is **Plaza Salvador**, a few blocks north of the real Catedral. I say "real" because Sevilla's most popular disco is in this area and also called the **Catedral** *(Cuesta del Rosario 12)*. A dancing, sweaty Spaniard described the place to me as *"muy cosmopolita."* And that it is (as well as *muy grande*), so long as you can get past the doormen (easier here than the next disco we'll be discussing) and step on down. It should cost 15€. As is typical in Spanish discos, Thursdays and Fridays go off to the hippity hop. Saturday is fairly dead but the house music keeps pumping. When Sunday night comes around, it seems as if the whole city has come out to dance.

I hasten to mention the entryway bars along **Calle Betis** in Triana across the river because many are overrun with foreigners (and I really shouldn't be spreading ill-will among my fellow *guiris*, the slightly disrespectful word some Spaniards use for foreigners. Apart from the flamenco dives mentioned previously in this area – and the *tapas* joints forthcoming – **Lagoon** *(C/ Betis 6)* makes you feel strange if you aren't drinking *vino tinto* atop old casks. Bars abound. On Calle Betis there is **Disco Boss** *(C/ Betis 2)*, though you'll want to hold off from visiting it until, say, 2 am. Locals speak highly of Disco Boss, and those that do typically frequent it. While this is often a good reason to try a place out, the doormen there can sometimes make it a pain. Locals are given priority over foreigners waiting in line, especially on crowded nights, such as "Funky Miercoles" each Wednesday. Dress sharply and act respectful if you want to increase your chances of getting in. Inside, the place looks industral and shakes to a mix of house, hip-hop and Top 40, depending on the DJ.

Next up is **Antique Teatro** *(Matemáticos Rey Pastor y Castro, s/n, antiguo Pabellón Olímpico)*, in the struggling Isla de la Cartuja done up for Expo '92. This is the third disco on the auction block, a modern looking edifice for a change. Commercial music inside with a long, crowded ground dance floor and a balcony equally jammed wrapping around it, as well as room to play in the yard. The DJ takes center stage. But before all this dancing, you'll want

to head to the area known as **Alameda de Hércules** after the Roman columns that support statues of Hercules and Julius Caesar at the ends of this green stretch just north of El Centro. The area will no doubt be packed and happy with a crowd that looks to care less about prevailing style and more about individual exploration. **El Baron Rampante**, **El Badulque** and **El Coloso en Llamas** are all good choices. Why? Because tourists such as ourselves rarely stumble on to them. **Café Central** doesn't fall into the same category, but it is frequented by the pub-going set. Three out of these four spots are *tranquilo* (chill) and occasionally have the good kind of flamenco Sevilla is known for.

The Fería de Abril

What began in the mid-19th century as a livestock fair intended to boost the weak Andalucían economy has gradually given way to a partying extravaganza following on the heels of solemn Semana Santa. During the last week in April, the fairgrounds across the river in the Barrio de Los Remedios come alive with all things instinctually Andalucían. *Cazetas*, or tents, are set up everywhere and families move in for the week, streets are named for famous bullfighters and women don the year's fashion in gypsy dress. Horse-drawn carriages are filled with Spaniards in traditional country attire, horse shows give way to nightly bullfights in the Plaza de Toros, and the smell of home-cooked meals fills the air. Flamenco can be heard all around and is free, but the majority of tents are privately owned and, as such, off-limits to foreigners unless someone on the inside catches a fancy; share a dance with a Spaniard and there is no telling where it will lead. Otherwise, the streets are alive and always inviting.

Flamenco

The *sevillana is* flamenco's torrid dance of courtship. It is all so simple in concept, four choreographed parts with moves known as *paseos* and *pasadas* that always relate the same bitter-sweet story of love: a man and a woman have met; they face off, getting to know each other, flirting in a series of cautious steps. The music takes over and, when the lovers renew their courtship, they have fallen for each other, their steps are excited, pounding the floor assuredly; their arms flail with lust. Sadly, by the third part something has gone terribly awry. The lovers are in the throes of a terrible disagreement, they are splitting up and their dancing is spiteful, contemptuous as if they would like nothing more than to spit in each other's face. The tension subsides by the last steps; the lovers have reconciled their differences. The dance becomes one elaborate display of renewed affection, pure joy. With dramatics, the courtier slides across the floor on his knees, coming to a stop with the music, while his lover holds her pose not unlike a proud bullfighter.

Flamenco is best experienced as an impromptu affair rather than a staged one, as a group of friends gathered in a little bar at 10 pm. A guitar is passed

around and settles in the hands of the most accomplished player. A quick, harsh chord may be strummed to signal the impending collaboration, followed by laughs born of its audacity. Then slowly, subtly, sounds will begin to merge. The rhythm in the guitar, in the clapping hands that pick up the beat and the feat tapping, a soft moan becomes a wail and before long four or five people are involved, others dancing, and a crowd of foreigners are peeking through the doorway wondering, "Can we come in?"

Yes, by all means step inside and order a beer if you are fortunate enough to stumble onto one of these raw sessions. Natural performers love the attention. But avoid at all costs the contemporary flamenco "halls" (El Palacio Andaluz comes to mind), where a fancy stage is surrounded by bolted theater seating; where sucker tourists watch overly flamboyant dancers shake their money makers. In this Las Vegas spectacle the singer might just as well be Wayne Newton (Yeaahh!). These are known as *tablaos de flamenco* and are, nonetheless, very popular. If you must, expect to pay 30€, which includes a cocktail, for either a 9 or 11 pm performance and stick to either **Los Gallos** *(Plaza de Santa Cruz 11, ☎ 95 421 69 81)* or **El Arenal** *(C/ Rodó 7, ☎ 95 421 64 92)* in the Arenal district.

Find your way to the free *taberna* shows and you'll avoid all the pomp and circumstance and probably have a better time. Wherever you go, you'll see other tourists, but there are a few places, like **La Carbonaría** *(C/ Levíes 18)* and **Lo Nuestro** *(C/ Betis 31)* whose style hasn't been diluted by foreign currency (and at least you'll be with other tourists "in the know"). The former was a coal yard with a bar near the Barrio de Santa Cruz. A small, dim entry room leads into a larger one in the back with long tables and a crowd that tends to look budget-minded. Flamenco starts after dinner and doesn't usually stop until around 3 or 4 am. The same goes for Lo Nuestro, which can be reached by crossing the Puente San Telmo into Triana before turning right at the Plaza de Cuba.

■ Where to Stay

A stay at **Alfonso XIII** *($$$$$, San Fernando 2, ☎ 95 491 70 00, maria.yerga@westin.com, d 350-490€)* doesn't come cheap but neither are its accommodations – far, far from it. Cornered by towering palms, the sumptuous palace crowds near the banks of the Guadalquivir, inaugurated by the King in 1929 for the Ibero-American exposition. The rooms surround a grand Mudéjar courtyard shadowed by marble columns that become arches, and all are appointed in the most audacious Sevillano style. You pay, as they say, for the atmosphere and perhaps for a drink or two at the elegant outdoor bar. The pool is an oasis in a green desert. The guest can't help but feel like a king or queen, which is exactly what the architect intended when the palace was designed to accommodate the bigwigs of the exposition.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Doña María *($$$, Don Remondo 19, ☎ 95 422 49 90, reserves@hdmaria.com, d 95-150€)* was the noble palace of María Sasiaín, heiress to the Marquesa de San Joaquín; and what a splendid view she would have enjoyed of the

Catedral just across the plaza from one of her numerous perches here in the Barrio de Santa Cruz. Two of the rooms on each floor have views of La Giralda, so snatch those up if possible – otherwise, what's the point? All of the rooms and common areas are decorated and furnished with antiques through and through. And on the roof is the best pool in Sevilla. From here a good cannonball could splash the Catedral.

To live like an Andalucían, **Hotel Simón** *($$, C/ García de Vinuesa 19, ☎ 95 422 66 00, hotel-simon@jet.es, d 70€)* is hard to match in terms of price, location and ambiance. The guest rooms are part of an 18th-century mansion, updated with every essential you'd find in a bigger, fancier hotel but here smaller, more charming and serene. You'll find its typical central patio bright and inviting. And they allow pets!

Hostería del Laurel *($$, Plaza de los Venerables 5, ☎ 95 422 02 95, host-laurel@eintec.es, d 65-85€)* is bolstered only by its reputation for having accommodated the 18th-century playwright José Zorrila when he was in the throes of writing his version of *Don Juan*, titled *El Tenorio*. This is the personification of Sevilla's Jewish inheritance. Glazed tiling on the roofs and balcony awnings, a toothpaste-white façade trimmed in melancholy yellow, orange trees and potted germaniums underneath which people are chattering away at plaza dinner tables dressed in white tablecloths. Rooms are aptly identified by the names of playwrights and are furnished conservatively but tastefully, kept spanking clean and occasionally open onto a wee little balcony. The only thing uninviting about them is the cold tiled floor, but that is standard fare.

Still in the Barrio de Santa Cruz is **Las Casas de la Judería** *($$$, Plaza Santa María la Blanca, Callejón Dos Hermanas, ☎ 95 441 51 50, juderia@casaspalacios.com, d 107-130€)*, another of Sevilla's private palaces gone public. This one was the former lair of the Duke of Béjar, an ardent supporter of Cervantes who apparently favored his patios (there are lots) and staircases (there are lots). Ask to see more than one room if possible; though each is furnished with quality antiques or imitation antiques, some rooms are larger than others. Those above the ground floor seem airier. Once your room is squared away, take time to relax on the roof terraces overlooking the city.

Budget

Hostal Lis II *(C/ Olavide 5, ☎ 95 456 02 28, d 30€)* is in a prime location in El Centro on a side-street running between C/ San Eloy and C/ O'Donell. The owner, a plump and friendly Venezuelan chap, is likely to regale you with stories of the terrible day when he was robbed by a teenager on a city bus and, having handed over his wallet, was about to be shot by the teen anyway when he pulled his own gun and shot the kid dead (it is still common to pack heat in Venezuela). The poor victim, as the owner explained, was only trying to get some money to feed his family. "He just went about it the wrong way." There was also the time when he personally insulted President Chávez and had to flee the country to... Spain. The hostel has an Internet station and hopefully by now the renovations are complete, because they caused quite a racket. To have devoted such space to this place is perhaps overkill since the rooms are sparse and not as inviting as the flowery courtyard.

Hostal Sierpes *(C/ Corral del Rey 22, ☎ 95 422 49 48, d 35-40€)* was once on the infamous street Sierpes. Now it is in the Barrio de Santa Cruz, with pleasant rooms, all with private baths, and a pretty laced and colonnaded courtyard. There is air conditioning in the summer (crucial) and a parking garage if you've driven in to town. Room 104 is *grande*.

Hostal Goya *(C/ Mateos Gago 31, ☎ 95 421 11 70, d 45-55€)* was renovated about 10 years ago and the rooms are still holding up fine. Each has, at the least, a shower and sink, though others have complete baths. Air conditioning would be nice, but the place manages to stay relatively cool when it's a steamer out there. The Catedral is a two-minute walk away.

Hostal Córdoba *(C/ Farnesio 12, ☎ 95 422 74 98, d 40-45€)* is a small establishment near Hostal Goya in the Barrio Santa Cruz. The eight rooms are a treat as far as hostels go: traditional oriental styling, shiny and clean, air conditioning. Rooms come with or without showers. It would behoove you to call ahead because the place is popular and there are few beds to go around.

■ What to Eat & Where

Sevilla is in Andalucía, which means a healthy dose of adeptly fried seafood, crackly Mediterranean salads and cool gazpacho soup. On the off-chance that you haven't gorged on Sevillano *tapas* and manage to make it into a restaurant, you may come across *riñones salteado con jerez* (kidneys sautéed with sherry). A *fino* and a *manzanillo* are a dry sherry and a common aperitif in Sevilla, owing to the city's proximity to that bastion of sherry production, Jerez de la Frontera. From Sanlúcar on the coast, Sevilla acquires its prawns and codfish. From nearby Huelva province arrive the country's most delectable *jamón serrano*. And at a lazy Susan in a niche of the San Leandro convent, cloistered nuns still spin delectable candied egg yolks for anyone who happens to knock.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

As a rule, every Spanish city has to have at least one great restaurant run by a Basque chef and **Egaña Oriza** *($$$$$, C/ San Fernando 41, ☎ 95 422 72 54, closed Sun.)* is Sevilla's. The atmosphere falls somewhere between contemporary and traditional – wood floors shiny enough to see your reflection, walls that are mostly windows with new-age stained glass accents and plants rapping against them from the gardens outside. The menu is a cross as well, with creative Basque dishes augmented by traditional Andalucían recipes. Salads might have fresh mushrooms with foie gras or partridge. The latter two could creep into a main course to be followed by wild strawberries doused in a delectable homemade cream cheese sauce.

La Albahaca *($$$$, Plaza de Santa Cruz 12, ☎ 95 421 30 49)* has good regional cuisine that has been liberated and a great outdoor garden terrace in which to enjoy it. Their take on that typically Andalucían cold soup known as gazpacho is one of the few reasons to look forward to the Sevillan summer: tomato cream base flavored with watermelon and oysters. Another house specialty is the *lubina con vinagreta de coco y guarnición de ciruelas*, which is a

flaky sea bass in a coconut vinaigrette sauce garnished with plums. And for desert, a fig soufflé in chocolate sauce.

Cross the river to **Río Grande** *($$, C/ Betis, ☎ 95 427 39 56)* for arguably the best fried fish you'll find in Sevilla (and there is a lot of fried fish going around in these parts). To reach the place, take the bridge from the Torre del Oro and hang a right on Betis. If too much grease is bad for your complexion, try the traditional oxtail stew (*la cola de toro guisada*) or seabass with cured ham and prawn stuffing (*lubina rellena de jamón y picatostes de langostinos*). A terrace with tables looks out over the river.

El Espigón *($$, C/ Bogotá 1, ☎ 95 462 68 51)* makes no frills about serving the stuff Andalucíans have been eating for centuries, *jamón serrano*, salted or fried fish, prawns in the like manner and flan (*tocino del cielo* is the Andalucían version) for dessert. You'll want to try a handful of the little fried fish bits known as *chanquetes*. While the interior is modern, it's a little bland (no repro mozarabic tiles, for one); but the normally quick and attentive waiters make up for any lost ground.

As it is, **San Marco** *($$, C/ Mesón del Moro 6, ☎ 95 456 43 90)* has more than its share of ambience. The restaurant occupies a 12th-century Arabic bathhouse at the base of La Giralda. Tables are set between the ancient columns supporting horseshoe arches. Strange thing is, San Marco is known for its Italian cuisine. Pastas take on a Mediterranean flavor, though, with saffron and *gambas* (prawns) and ossobuco is never a bad choice for certain tastes.

To eat real Arabic food, try **As-Sawirah** *($, C/ Galera 5, ☎ 954 56 22 68)*, a small Moroccan restaurant a block north of the Plaza de Toros in the Arenal district. Here you can try *tajine* without having to go all the way across the Strait of Gibraltar. This is their typical stew with either meat, chicken or pigeon and an assortment of vegetables baked in a cone-shaped clay bowl and served steaming hot. To cool down, have some natural yogurt with fresh fruit. The *menu del día* costs 11€ and it is served with a smile.

Tapas

To *ir de tapas* is a ravenous affair in this city. Locals are likely to tell you that they'd rather stand on one leg while talking with a mouthful of calamari than sit down to a formal dinner. Of the *tapas* that are unique to Sevilla, *caracoles* are large snails; *pavias* are battered and fried strips of salted fish (usually cod); *pringas* are baked rolls stuffed with a vegetable and pork hash; *tortillas* are often streaked with green, which indicates they have been enhanced by peppers, spinach or asparagus; and *espinacas con garbanzos* is a refried mix of spinach and chickpeas. *Tapas* bars put out their best offerings for the lunch hour around 2 pm and again for dinner around 9 pm. If you're hungry in-between, the leftovers from lunch are usually still sitting out until the saucers and hot pans are filled for the second go-round.

El Patio San Eloy *(C/ San Eloy)* is fun and bright and almost invariably crowded. Just saddle up to the bar wherever you can and, if the right words aren't forthcoming, point at what looks good. It's easy here; cranny after cranny is lined with prep'd *burguillos* (small *bocadillos*, those crusty sub sandwiches you've seen people woofing down on the streets) and each is labeled: *Catalan, Andaluz, Belga, Noruego*. Just sample the one or two that look the best and then head over to the colorful tiled terrace seats in the back.

A visit to **Bar Estrella** *(C/ Estrella 3, ☎ 95 422 75 35)* will not change your life, but it's been around a good while serving all the standard *tapas*: *croquetas* (batter-fried mashed potatoes with ham or cheese), anchovies in olive oil, *albondigas* (meatballs), manchego cheese; their house *tapa* is, shall I say, a little more *única* and yes, the yummiest. *Berenjenas tapadas* are sliced eggplant topped with fried peppers and tomatoes, diced prawns and hardboiled egg all covered in a rich white sauce.

Do not neglect **La Triana district** all the way across the river as so many do. You'll duck beneath hanging ham legs and skirt past upturned sherry casks at **La Albariza** *(Calle Betis 6)*. If you order the ham it will come thinly sliced as always, or try the *pimientos rellenos de bacalao* (batter-fried peppers stuffed with codfish), or perhaps a seafood empanada (a doughy pastry filled, in this case, with seafood). Just set your glass of manzanillo down on the table casks when you're ready to go back for more. Not far away is **Sol y Sombra** (C/ Castilla 151), a wide-open restaurant and *tapas* bar that is all about the bullfight (it has, as they say, *ambiante taurino*). Cherry wood paneling is mostly hidden by the fight posters, which make for good entertainment when the conversation ain't so swift. The tile floor collects cigarette ash and crumpled napkins like a great big trash can. The latter is dealt with after each wave of hungry Spaniards has subsided, their bellies stuffed with spicy sausage (*chacina Ibérica*), beef tips in tomato sauce and grilled prawns smothered in garlic.

Excursions from Sevilla

■ Itálica

The Roman ruins of Itálica in Santiponce can be reached from Sevilla in a little over 10 minutes by heading northwest on the N-630/E-803. The ancient city was founded by General Publius Cornelius Scipio in 206 BC and still feeds off its reputation as a city of firsts: the first Roman town in Spain, the birthplace of Marcus Ulpius Trajan (53-117 AD) and Publius Aelius Hadrian (76-138 AD, shown below), the first Roman Emperors born on the Iberían Peninsula. The site is fairly remarkable; that is, what's visible of it. The earliest neighborhood, the *vetus urbs* (old city) established by Scipio with the city's founding, now rests somewhere beneath the town of Santiponce. The "new" neighborhood, or *nova urbs*, dates to the second century BC! This is the neighborhood tourists can see. Imagination turns what are mostly the foundations of a street plan into a 2,000-year-old picture. There is a theater to be seen, as well as one of the largest Roman amphitheaters ever to have been built with a capacity of over 20,000 spectators, excavated temples, palaces adorned with mosaics, and walls, always walls. *(Avda Extremadura 2 Santiponce, Sevilla, ☎ 95 599 65 83; open summers Tues.-Sat. 8:30 am-8:30 pm, Sun. 9 am-3 pm; winters Tues.-Sat. 9 am-5:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-4 pm; entry 1.50€.)*

■ Carmona

Carmona tops a small rise in a fertile valley 30 km (1.9 miles) east of Sevilla on the N-IV/E-5. It's a relatively small place to have two *alcazares* (fortresses), one the work of the Moors with some earlier Roman indications, the other a much larger Mudéjar fortress, the rework of King Pedro I. Steeples rise throughout the town, signaling the path to Christ by way of the numerous churches. If you choose this orthodox route, head for the San Pedro cathedral across the street from the old alcazar after having traipsed around La Puerta de Sevilla (where the tourism office is also located). Pass the church and follow the street of the same name away from the town to the excavated necrópolis (graveyard), a rare find in Spain and primary among Carmona's Roman remains.

■ Parque Nacional de Doñana

Along the Atlantic Ocean at the convergence of Sevilla, Huelva and Cádiz provinces, Doñana National Park encompasses Western Europe's largest and biographically most important surviving wetlands. Its proximity to North Africa ensures that great clouds of birds stop to rest, reproduce and feed among its habitats during their yearly migratory routes to and from northern Europe. The birds, which can number well into the millions, in turn attract great numbers of ornithologists and weekend bird-watchers who clamber to catch sight of the endangered Spanish imperial eagle or the more common flamingos, avocets and herons. Marshlands, or *marismas*, are the most predominant of the park's three cooperative eco-systems, formed by the silting of the River Guadalquivir estuary at the mouth of the Atlantic over 1,500 years ago.

The river serves as the eastern boundary of Doñana. From its mouth to the west along the Atlantic coast, tidal winds sweep Spain's longest and most pristine beach into sand dunes, accounting for the second unique eco-system in the park. As the dunes are slowly pushed inland they pile up and over pine forests, the park's third habitat, and verge on the *marismas*. These *corrals,* as they are known, will eventually be swept back to the sea, leaving behind a graveyard of pines as the cycle repeats itself.

In the thick undergrowth of Doñana, the Iberian or pardel lynx, a large spotted cat that has been pushed to the brink of extinction by human intervention, still prowls for rabbits. There are believed to be at least 25 pairs in the park, making it the largest surviving population of this breed in Western Europe.

This delicate eco-system is at the whim of nature and, moreover, of humans. A successful visit to the park is largely dependant on the former, while the park's longevity is tied to the latter. If the rains don't pour in sufficient levels the natural mating and feeding schedules of the birds will be disturbed, some will be forced to press on rather than stop; the marshes will run dry earlier than August and the cracked surface will be littered with carcasses of aquatic birds. If the humans don't mind their activities, another tragedy will occur as it did in 1989, when a reservoir holding mining effluent ruptured and drained toxic waste into the River Guadiamar, contaminating essential habi-

tats and killing thousands of birds, fish and mammals. To stem the devastation, sandbags and dykes were hastily packed along the banks in an attempt to divert the river's polluted waters from greater expanses of the park. While much of Doñana was apparently spared ruin, the true extent of the damage has yet to be realized. Agricultural practices account for their own damage, with the irrigation of nearby rice fields lowering the park's water table and pesticides always a lethal concern.

The flamingo depends on the park's supply of shrimp for nourishment and for procreation. If the water table is low and the shrimp scarce, the flamengo will not be able to feed sufficiently in order to turn from white to its characteristic pink color, which attracts mates.

Year in and year out, as domestic cats increase in numbers and filter into the park from the nearby towns of Matalasañas and El Rocío, the birds decrease in number. Of the 900,000 acres of wetland that originally made up the park – long before it was declared a national park in 1969 and was instead known as the *Coto Doñana* (Doñana's hunting reserve) – only 200,000 remain.

Doñana's Cycles

Fall rains fill the marshes that have lain dry since July and by winter the water table has leveled out. Aquatic birds, including geese and ducks, advance upon these areas in great numbers from northern Europe to spend the winter. By spring the waters have begun to recede and the park comes to life with an astonishing variety of new birds, some stopping only temporarily in their migration north, others settling down to nest. Now you can spot bee-eaters, egrets, kites, terns, flamingos and herons. By mid-summer the temperature is rising and the water is evaporating. Perch flutter in the stagnant pools and birds that were not willing or able to leave now lie dying or dead. The great predators, vultures, eagles, herons and kites, sweep in to clean up the leftovers during what remains of the summer.

Getting Here & Away

By Bus: From the Plaza de Armas bus station, the private carrier Damas runs two to four buses per day from Sevilla to Matalascañas.

By Car: From Sevilla by car, take the E-1/A-49 west. At Bollullos Par del Condado turn south, passing through Almonte and El Rocío; follow the H 612 to arrive at Matalasañas.

Park Information

Access to the National Park, as opposed to the Natural Park that serves as a human buffer around this more sensitive area, is restricted. Guided tours are usually the only way to get into the heart of Doñana. As an alternative, a number of visitor centers are located in the towns and villages of this periphery zone, each with distinct

natural areas that are representative of those in the larger National Park and freely accessible by trails. The **Centro de Visitantes del Acebuche** *(☎ 95 944 87 11)* is two km (1.2 miles) north of Matalasañas on the N-612 running to El Rocío. This is the main entrance and information office for the park, generally open every day from sun-up to sun-down. From here a number of short hiking trails lead through pine groves and a string of lagoons which, depending upon the season, may harbor aquatic flyers.

Ten km (6.2 miles) north, near El Rocío, is the **Centro de Visitantes Las Rocinas** *(☎ 95 944 23 40)*, with exhibitions, audio-visual information and the trailhead of a three-km (1.9-mile) jaunt through *las marismas* (the marshes) past aquatic flora and fauna. The bridge at El Rocío is a popular viewing spot of ornithologists in the spring, when the birds are most plentiful. At this time you'll likely see kites, terns, herons, egrets and occasionally, with luck, a Spanish imperial eagle.

The **Palacío del Acebrón** is another information center six km (3.7 miles) west of Las Rocinas. The area is recognized as one of the last riverside forests and the trails are easy to follow.

The **Centro de Interpretación de la Fábrica de Hielo** occupies a former ice house used by area fishermen. This information center is in the port town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the southeastern edge of the park – good for travelers visiting from the east. It's not advisable to visit the **Centro de Interpetación Cerrado Garrido** in the village of Aznalcázar. It's in a rich marshland, but the roads are poorly marked and maintained.

(Parque Nacional de Doñana, Centro Recepción El Acebuche, Carretera Rocío-Matalascañas, ☎ 95 944 85 76, www.parquenacionaldonana.com, info@parquenacionaldonana.com); Parque Natural de Doñana, C/ Sevilla 33, Almonte, ☎ 95 945 01 59, fax 95 945 04 71.)

Guided Adventures

In association with the park, **Doñana.es** *(Oficina Tursmo de El Rocío, Avda Canaliega, ☎ 95 944 38 08, www.donana.es)* arranges a variety of excursions with access to the National Park in its entirety. Their tours cater to larger groups: a minimum of 50 people are required for the air-conditioned touring bus (21€ per person); a minimum of 21 people are required to book ATV tours of the park (30€); 15 people are required for hiking tours (9€ per person); horseback and catamaran tours require at least eight people (50-90€). Booking in advance is necessary. If there are few in your party, spots will usually be left over after the various school groups have made their reservations. All of the tourism companies will supply binoculars, but as for bug spray and sunscreen, you're on your own.

For smaller groups or individuals, try the private guide services on the fringes of the park, such as the following.

Departing from Malascañas

Arenas de Doñana *(C/ Torre de Almenara, Matalascañas, ☎ 95 944 12 41, arenasdonana@infodonana.com)* offers four-hour **4x4 trips** through the environs of the park for 20€. Their three guides will also lead hikers along various routes depending on their preferences (15€ per day). **Club Hipico El Pasodoble** *(Sector G, parcela 90, Matalascañas, ☎ 95 944 82 41)* also offers 4x4 tours from Malascañas that leave every day at 7:30 am and again at

4:30 pm, lasting about four hours. They specialize, however, in **horseback tours**. A standard horseback ride lasts two hours, costs 18€ per person and wends through the dunes and the beach around the west end of the park – not always the best area to see birds. These tours leave every day at 9 am, 6 pm and 8 pm, and you'll want to call and book in advance.

Departing from El Rocío

Doñatour *(C/ El Real 31, El Rocío, ☎ 95 944 24 68, www.donana.com)* is one of the largest guide operations around the park. They offer **multi-day tours** of the park and maintain a *casa rural* with 22 rooms for that purpose. A week-long stay, including lodging and guided 4x4 and hiking excursions, costs 240€ and should be booked well in advance. Otherwise, a four-hour 4x4 tour costs 15€. **Doñana Ecuestre** *(Hotel Puente del Rey, Avda Canaliega, El Rocío, ☎ 95 944 24 74, info@donanaecuestre.com)* arranges **horse-drawn carriage rides** through the western fringes of the park (two hours, 21€ per person). They'll also unhitch the horses for a trot through the park (two hours, 21€ per person) or do away with them altogether and gas up the ATVs (four hours, 19€). **Marismas del Rocío** *(Plaza Acebuchal 22, El Rocío, ☎ 95 943 04 32)* has been taking people inside the park afoot or in 4x4s for over 20 years. Hiking or driving tours leave every day at 8:30 am and 5 pm and cost 18€ apiece for four hours. As with all of the guide companies around Doñana, booking ahead is usually necessary, especially in the spring and early summer when birds and people flock here.

Where to Stay

Hotel Toruño *(Plaza Acebuchal 22, El Rocío, ☎ 95 944 23 23, fax 95 944 23 38, h.toruno@eresmas.com, d 60€)* has 30 modern rooms and a glass vestibule that overlooks the surrounding marshes. On the seventh weekend after Easter the *Romería del Rocío* (pilgrimage to El Rocío) is well underway and room prices jump to 300€! **Hostal Cristina** *(C/ El Real 58, El Rocío, ☎ 95 944 24 13)* has endurable rooms with either shower or bath for 25-35€.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

El Flamero *(Ronda Maestra Alonso, Matalascañas, ☎ 90 250 51 00, www.hotelflamero.es, reserves@hotelflamero.es)* is a great big resort hotel on the beach. In the complex there are two pools, a disco, a hair salon, three or four restaurants and a heck of a lot of British. During the summer doubles cost anywhere from 55 to 75€. Apartments with kitchenettes are also available for longer stays. **Pension Los Tamarindos** *(Avda de la Adelfas 31, Matalascañas, ☎ 95 943 01 19)* is a cheaper alternative near the water. The 17 rooms are clean and comfortable and can be yours for 40-60€ per day.

The **Hotel Posada de Palacio** *(C/ Caballero 11, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, ☎ 95 636 48 40)* takes the place of an 18th-century monastery. Rooms are amply equipped and each distinctly decorated, some with antiques, others with contemporary furnishings. A fancy place for a dusty romp through Doñana. Doubles cost 85-100€. **La Bohemia** *(C/ Don Claudio 5, Sanlúcar de*

Barrameda, ☎ 95 636 599) is a clean and simple pension with seven rooms, each with either a shower or full bath. Prices range between 30 and 40€.

Camping

In Matalascañas, **Rocío Playa** *(Carretera Huelva-Matalascañas, km 51, ☎ 95 943 02 40)* is a massive campground with a capacity for over 4,000 people. It has beach access, a supermarket and bungalows for rent. Adults cost 3.65€, as does each tent or car space. **La Aldea** *(☎ 95 944 26 77, wwwlcampinglaaldea.com)* is another large campsite in El Rocío off the H-612. Bodies, tent and car spaces each cost 3.50€ per night. The grounds are fully outfitted with a restaurant, market, swimming pool and real trees.

Córdoba

Córdoba, distant and lonely.
Black pony, large moon,
In my saddlebag olives.
Well as I know the roads,
I shall never reach Córdoba.
Over the plain, through the wind,
Black pony, red moon.
Death keeps a watch on me,
From Córdoba's towers.
Oh, such a long way to go,
And oh, my spirited pony.
Oh, but death awaits me,
Before I ever reach Córdoba.
Federico Garcia Lorca*, Rider's Song*

■ History

This city of just over 300,000 once had three times as many people when it was the leading intellectual center of Islam. Its fabled La Mezquita, now part-mosque, part-cathedral, still stands as one of the largest in the world and the focal point of interest in the city. The Moors arrived on the peninsula in 711 and in short order captured Córdoba along the banks of the Guadalquivir River. The city had been founded in 169 BC by the Romans and had already gained its intellectual reputation as the birthplace of the philosopher Lucius Anneus Seneca. From the eighth through the 11th centuries, the Moors lived in relative harmony with the Christians and the Jews. The latter gave the city the great doctor Maimonides (1135-1204), its most charming neighborhood, the *Judería*, and numerous synagogues, of which only one remains. Caliphal Córdoba had as many as 1,000 mosques, hundreds of baths, a number of the world's richest libraries, early publishing houses printing copy after copy of the Koran, and city lighting hundreds of years before such a thing was even considered in other parts of the world. Great minds inhabited the city – poets, musicians, doctors and philosophers such as Averroës (1126-1198). Córdoba was rivaled

only by the likes of Damascus. The Moors remained in Córdoba until the Christians had supplanted them in 1236. They retreated to the Alhambra in Granada, which had previously been only a provincial outpost. Córdoba would soon lose its luster and Granada would flower into the last prosperous enclave of Al-Andalus during the next 200 years.

■ Useful Information

Tourism Offices

Oficina de Turismo Municipal *(Plaza de Judá Leví, ☎ 957 20 05 22)* is less convenient than the **Oficina de Turismo de Andalucía** *(C/ Torrijos 10, ☎ 95 747 12 35)*, just across from the entrance to La Mezquita.

Tour Options

Córdoba Vision *(☎ 95 776 02 41)* organizes walking and bus tours of the city *(25€, Tues.-Sat. 10:30 am, four hours, meeting point is the bus stop on Avda del Alcázar near the river and the fortress)* and the nearby Medina Azahara *(18€, two-three hours)*. Tickets can be purchased at their locations on Avda Doctor Fleming 10 or C/ Lagartijo 4.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: By rail, en route to and from **Madrid** (two hours) and **Sevilla** (one hour), the high-speed AVE train stops at Córdoba's station up to 18 times per day *(Avda América, ☎ 95 740 02 02, a 10-minute walk north from La Mezquita near the Diego de Rivas gardens)*. **Granada** (four-five hours) requires a transfer along the way. Up to six trains run daily direct to **Cádiz** (three hours) and **Málaga** (2½ hours) and half that number go **to Barcelona** (12 hours).

By Bus: Bus service runs to **Madrid** (five hours, up to six per day); **Sevilla** (1½ hours, up to 12 per day); **Málaga** (three hours, up to four per day); **Cádiz** (five hours, two-three per day); **Granada** (three hours, up to 10 per day); **Barcelona** (11 hours, one per day).

By Car: From **Madrid** by car, the fastest route is the N-IV south all the way; from **Sevilla**, take the N-IV east; from **Cádiz**, the N-IV north and exit for Utrera on the A-364. At Écija this road connects with the N-IV/E-5 continuing northeast to Córdoba. From **Málaga**, take the N-331 north. This road connects with the A-92 near Antequera. Head west and shortly thereafter exit and drive north on the N-331. From **Granada**, take the N-323 north and just past Jáen catch the N-IV west.

■ Sightseeing

> *"Truth will never be tedious to him that travels through the nature of things; it is falsehood that gluts us."* Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BC-65 AD)

La Mezquita

This was ground zero for the flourishing culture of Córdoba during its four centuries of Moorish control and still stands as one of the largest mosques in the Islamic world. In its evolution La Mezquita

came to be a cathedral under the Christians. The mosque/cathedral today advances Islamic, Mudéjar, Renaissance and Baroque styles.

Work on the mosque was begun in 784 AD under Abd Rahman-Rahman I on the site of a former Visigothic church, which had claimed the site of a former Roman temple. In a strange but not uncommon twist, the design was borrowed from a Christian basilica; various other Christian monuments throughout southern Spain were looted for the capitals and columns that would adorn the interior. Christians and Jews were put to work on the task and their names are inscribed on walls and columns throughout the mosque.

A century later, Abd Rahman-Rahman III oversaw the reinforcement of the north wall and erection of a new minaret, al Alminar, which was the tower used to call faithful to service. Fully a century after that in the years 962-976, Al Hakam II hired artists from the Orient to embellish the mosque's attractive mirhab, the niche indicating the kiblah or sacred stone marking the direction to face when kneeling to Mecca. He also added 12 naves to the 12 already in place; eight more were added later under al-Mansur. The mirhab consists of three richly detailed chapels accented with blue and bronze colored ceramic mosaics, with carved marble and stucco latticework and numerous inscribed passages of the Koran.

The structure itself is fairly unimpressive from the outside, a great dirty square of walls with false arches and no indication of what resides inside. The walls were originally open so that the faithful could enter from any direction and the effect must have been like that of walking into a great petrified forest of columns and arches. Now one must step through the gate and into the expansive Patio de Las Naranjas studded with orange trees to begin to surmise the scale of the place. Here the Muslims traditionally performed their ablutions, holy baths meant to cleanse the spirit, while inside they would invoke the fabled arm of Muhammad before setting off to battle the Christians. Once the Christians had reclaimed Córdoba in the 13th century and set to the task of reworking the mosque into a Christian domain, the walls were shut and chapels were added that can be seen lining the inside of the mosque/church where they collect dust. The Capilla de Santa Teresa is the most interesting with its 16th-century processional monstrance (a receptacle in which the consecrated Host is exposed for adoration) and heaps of gold and silver embellishment.

Initially, only a few rows of the mosque's trademark red and yellow banded arches were removed in the center to make way for the chapels. The actual Capilla Real was built later in the 16th century in a mix of Baroque, Gothic and plateresque styles. In touring the mosque, little emphasis is placed on the cathedral because so many consider it a monstrosity, nestled or perhaps

plowed among the beautiful solid forest of columns with their Paleochristian and Roman capitals and their horseshoe arches, one atop of another filling 19 naves. Over 800 of these arches remain today and the sight of them is bewildering and sticks in the minds of visitors long after they've left. Upon seeing what the Christians had constructed in the mosque, King Carlos V, the man who had allowed the construction of the cathedral sight-unseen, is reported to have said, "If I had known what you were up to, you would not have done it. For what you have made here may be found in many other places, but what you have destroyed is to be found nowhere else in the world."

(C/ Torrijos, ☎ 95 747 05 12, open April-June Mon.-Sat. 10 am-7:30 pm, Sun. 9 am-10:45 am and 1:30-6:30 pm; mass at 11 am, noon, 1 pm; entry fee 6.50€, children and students 3.25€.)

La Alcázar de los Reyes Christianos

This Gothic fortress and royal residence was begun under Alfonso XI in 1327 atop a Muslim castle. Later the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel took up residence here during the Reconquest and allegedly saw Columbus off on his trip to the New World, though Sevilla makes a similar, and more substantiated claim. From its battlements there are views of the Guadalquivir and the **Puente Romano** (Roman Bridge) built by Emperor Augustus. *(Campo Santo de los Mártires, ☎ 95 742 01 51, open 10 am-2 pm and 5:30-7:30 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm, entry fee 2€, Fri. is free.)*

At the end of the bridge on the near side of the river is the **Puerta del Puente** (bridge gate), constructed in the 16th century under Felipe II and rebuilt after demolitions in the 20th century; along with the Puerta Almodóvar, it is the only remaining gate of Córdoba's original city walls. Opposite it is the **Torre de La Calahorra**, the city's oldest surviving Moorish defensive tower. In 1369 the tower was restored and reinforced by Henry II of Trastámara to guard against attacks by his brother, Pedro I (the Cruel). It has served as a jail, a women's school and today houses **El Museo Vivo de al-Andalus** with exhibitions on the past and present culture of southern Spain. *(Museum of the Living Al-Andalus, ☎ 95 729 39 29, open 10 am-2 pm and 4:30-8:30 pm, entry fee 4€, children and students 2€; audiovisual at 11 am, noon, 1 pm, 3 pm and 4 pm, fee 1.20€.)*

The battlement walls of the Alcázar are bound by three Gothic towers, Del Homenaje (the Homage), Del Léon (the Lion) and De la Inquisición (the Inquisition). On display inside are third-century Roman sarcophagi and a strong collection of mosaics dating to the second century. The latter were discovered in Corredera Plaza when remodeling works were going on in 1959.

The well-manicured outer gardens are the pride of the Alcázar, a long series of rectangular pools, hedges and flower gardens shaded by citrus, cypresses and palm trees that were designed by the Christians in the Arabic style.

Synagogue

Córdoba's Synagogue is the last of its kind to have survived in southern Spain, a Mudéjar work dating to 1315. The interior walls are finished in plaster with floral motifs and epigraphs referencing the Song of Songs and psalms. Originally, the synagogue was entered through a small courtyard, through which an entryway led to the prayer room. Steps flanking the vestibule were used by the women during prayer services.

Other Sights

The 17th-century **Corredera Square** is a long rectangle of faded red brick and what seems like too much open space to be put to good use. When it was designed, the architect Antonio Ramos borrowed from the prevailing Baroque themes in Castilla y León to the north. It has a rough quality that is almost endearing, for there is little to look on that is impressive, it appears dirty and one can do little more than wonder about its past. Horse races and bullfights once filled the square. Now there are a few hundred people loitering about, but not anything like the great plazas of Spain that draw the crowds and, as a result, renovations. In one corner, tables are set out for dining and at another end are a few crafts shops and narrow roads leading off through the Jewish quarter. Cars tend to pile up around the fringes, many of them belonging to government workers at the City Hall who, in the days of yore, would have likely overseen the public executions that were frequently carried out in this square.

In the 15th century, horses were shod in the Renaissance **Plaza del Potro**. The fountain with the colt, from which the square takes its name, was added in the 16th century. A few steps away is **La Posada del Potro** *(Plaza del Potro, ☎ 95 748 50 01, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm)*, an inn that dates to the 14th century and retains much the same look it did then, with wagon wheels leaning against the white brick, lumpy white stucco walls as if they were undergoing repair, a second-floor balcony and rooms trimmed with a heavy, roughhewn wood. Among its former residents was none other than Miguel de Cervantes who wrote and staged scenes here.

Also in the square is the **Museo de Julio Romero de Torres Museum** *(Plaza del Potro 1, ☎ 95 749 19 09, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5:30-7:30 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm, entry 3€, students and children 1.50€).* This museum is devoted to the revered Córdoban painter Julio Romero de Torres, who could make a Córdoban woman look like an angel. Four rooms are devoted to his various stages of creativity that culminated with his heavily saturated yet sensitive masterpieces, "La Copla" and "La Chiquita Piconera."

Before There Was a Renaissance Man

Philosopher, poet, playwright, politician Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in Córdoba in 55 BC. A Roman by birthright, a Spaniard by birth, Seneca served as council to the Emperor Nero while espousing profound ideals on stoicism and government; his remarks painted the empires which he helped to bridge in a style that was occasionally absurd, acute and witty long before Cervantes came to typify the best in Spanish literature. Less than half of his book, *Oratorum Sententiae Divisiones Colores*, survives; but that which exists still finds its way into the hands and hearts of true intellectuals the world over. Having foresworn the Emperor's licentious ways, Seneca was ordered by Nero to commit suicide; the great voice gracefully accepted silencing.

Museo Arqueológico has eight rooms displaying prehistoric and Roman pieces, including coins, mosaics and sculptures (ground floor); fourth-eighth-century Visigothic pieces along with Muslim relics are shown on the second floor. *(Plaza Jerónimo Páez 7, ☎ 95 747 40 11, open Tues. 3-8 pm, Wed-Sat. 9 am-8 pm, Sun. 9 am-3 pm, entry 1.50€.)*

La Casa Andalusí is about as close as one can get these days to the more elegant living quarters of Al-Andalus. The patio is colored in ivory with a pebbled mosaic floor while the basement displays some earlier Visigothic traces. The Moorish room is dedicated to relics of this culture, artworks, Arabic coins, clothing and a model of an early printing machine that would have been used during this period to spit out the Koran. *(C/ Judíos 12, ☎ 95 729 06 42, open Mon.-Sun. 10:30 am-7 pm, entry fee 2.50€, students 1.50€.)*

■ Nightlife

Mesón Flamenco La Bulería *(C/ Pedro López 3, ☎ 95 748 38 39)* is a well-known locale that puts on affordable nightly flamenco shows with performers that haven't sold their souls to the flamenco devil. The setting is cozy and authentic with a small ensemble, the guitarists in repose on simple wooden chairs and the sound, rather than the spectacle, doing all the convincing. Shows are held every night at 10:30 pm and cost 11€, which includes one drink.

Tablao Flamenco Cardenal *(C/ Torrijos 10, ☎ 95 748 33 20)* is a larger venue but not without its own Moorish charm; the setting is extravagant and shows are often headlined with the country's most accomplished performers. The place fills in the high-season, so call to make reservations for the 10:30 shows Mon.-Sat.; 18€ buys a seat and a drink.

■ Adventures in Water

Few things are as relaxing as a visit to an authentic Arabic bathhouse and few of these are still around. Córdoba's is called **Hammam** *(C/ Corregidor Luis de la Cerda 51, ☎ 95 748 47 46, medinacalafil@grupoalandalus.com)*, with ancient halls and archways, latticework, steamy baths as well as chilly ones and that jingly jangly Arabic music that is so conducive to sleep. During Córdoba's Moorish hey-day, over 600 of these baths were in operation. A visit costs 12€ to soak in the waters. For the complete treatment, which includes aromatherapy, a massage, the baths and tea, it'll cost 21€. As is typical of these places, expect to wait a good number of hours if you've opted for the massage because the system is first-come, first-served and that doesn't necessarily mean anything. Reservations will help.

■ Where to Stay

For a short stay in Córdoba, the **Parador de La Arruzafa** *($$$, Avda de la Arruzafa, ☎ 95 727 59 00, fax 95 728 04 09; d 109€)* may be impractical. It is a few km north of the town and although taxis are just a phone call away and cost little more than 7€ to get to town, why bother? This *parador* does not have the charm of some other government-run hotels, at least on the exterior. The site was a former summer playground for an eighth-century Córdoban caliph. The hotel smacks of a late 1960s design disaster, but the surrounding foliage, with its oaks and palms (the hotel's name means "garden of palm trees"), conceals the less at-

tractive aspects. The rooms are elegantly done up with wicker and carved furniture, satins and doused in tranquilized tones. Situated at the base of the Sierra Moreno Mountains, it's a nod cooler than the town in summer.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Put the shades on for **Los Omeyas** *($$, C/ Encarnación 17, ☎ 95 749 22 67, fax 95 749 16 59, d 48-59€).* This Al-Andalus-styled hotel is a blinding white inside and out that gives way only in the mellowed-out bedrooms. Though small, all have private bath, air conditioning, stiff beds and share a sterile Moorish courtyard ringed by marble columns and unembellished arches. It's just a block away from La Mezquita in the old Jewish quarter.

Hostal El Triunfo *(Corregidr Luis de la Cerda 79, ☎ 95 749 84 84, www.htriunfo.com, reservas@htriunfo.com, d 55€)* shares the street with La Mezquita. The spot, along with the fact that Triunfo is nicer than most hostels and cheaper than most hotels, makes it a prime target for summertime tour buses. Book ahead. This is a great place to stay if your last name isn't Trump. A happy plaster façade of Jewish craftsmanship trimmed in yellows and topped by tiles and brickwork introduces interior Moorish patios with blue and orange tiles, bricked archways and rooms that, if simple, suffice – with private bath, television and that precious commodity in southern Spain, air conditioning.

On the opposite side of La Mezquita is the ☆ **Hotel Los Patios** *($$, C/ Cardenal Herrero 14, ☎ 95 747 83 40, fax 95 748 69 66, d 50€).* The name comes from its three open-air patios surrounded by 24 modernized rooms with full bath, television and air conditioning. With pebbled-mosaic flooring and potted flowers lining the white walls, the hotel's patios have the Moorish ambiance its rooms lack. One of these open-air patios is set with tables served by the hotel's restaurant, which specializes in traditional Córdoban cuisine such as *rabo de toro* (stewed ox tail) and gazpacho.

The recently renovated **Hostal Lineros 38** *(C/ Lineros 38, ☎ 95 748 25 17, www.hostallineros38.com, d 30-40€)* is a trendy take on traditional Andalucían and Moorish design. Brick arches are everywhere and made to look ancient, while walls are splashed in spritely lavenders, ochres, greens and whites. A tall courtyard is capped by a stained glass ceiling. The owner, also the interior decorator, has style. A hip, fun place to stay with fresh rooms equipped with new bathrooms, lounge areas with heavy Moorish couches and octagonal wood-marquetry tables.

Though not as lively, **Hostal Los Arcos** *(C/ Romero Barros 14, ☎ 95 748 56 43, d 35€)* maintains its standard Moorish styling with a small, pleasing courtyard centered by a fountain and crowded with plants. The rooms are situated around the patio; a little drab they are, but noisy and dirty they aren't.

Hostal La Fuente *(C/ San Fernando 51, ☎ 95 748 78 27, hostallafuente@terra.es, d 40€)* is more of the same in styling, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Iron grillwork, elaborate and colorful tiling, white walls, courtyards, arches, and rooms that are new and clean with private bath. In truth, Córdoba is chock-full of pleasant budget hostels and this is

one of them. During Semana Santa, La Fuente was the only hostel that had rooms available and every other hostel seemed to know this, as if it is a yearly occurrence. The roof terrace is a nice perk, with tables and a view onto the town.

Camping

El Brillante *(Avda del Brillante 50, ☎ 95 740 38 36, fax 95 728 21 65)* can be reached by taking Avda de América east from the train station before making a left on Avda del Brillante. From the bus station it's a 10-minute walk north to Avda de América, where the same route can be followed. Otherwise, bus #10 runs to the campsite and leaves it every 10 minutes. The grounds have a supermarket, swimming pool, hot showers, restaurant, post drop, hook-up essentials and no ferocious guard dogs. A plot costs 17€ and allows two people, a car and tent space or a car and caravan. Individuals with tent cost under 6€ per night.

■ What to Eat & Where

Ask the locals about their preferred restaurants and they will point the way to either **El Caballo Rojo** *($$$$, C/ Cardenal Herrero 28, ☎ 95 747 53 75)* or **El Churrasco** *($$$, C/ Romero 16, ☎ 95 729 08 19)*. Both serve traditional Córdoban cuisine in classic Andalucían settings, with white tablecloths, interior patios and managers roaming the floor to light cigarettes and ensure that the meals were received with satisfaction. Each has a unique take on gazpacho, one with pine nuts, the other with almonds. Of the seafood, *bacalao* (cod) and *lubina* (sea bass) commonly get the grilled or fried treatment and *rabo de toro* (stewed ox tail) is exceptional and compulsory on any good southern menu. Either of the two can be found just north of La Mezquita.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Bodegas Campos *($$$, C/ de los Lineros 32, ☎ 95 747 41 42)* just keeps going and going... literally and figuratively. A walk through the courtyard is a long one, eventually leading to the *barrida de vinos*, where old wooden wine casks are stacked one on top of the other, each autographed by rich and famous personalities from Mariposa to Tony Blair. This classy restaurant and bar was established in 1908 and the photographs on the walls, of famous *toreros*, flamenco singers and actors, date back almost that far. The staff couldn't be friendlier, which is why I may sound as if I'm stuck in flattery mode. The cuisine is as classically Córdoban as the ambiance, with *rabo de toro* (stewed ox tail) and a simple house specialty called *patatas cortijeras*, which is a mix of spicy chorizo sausage, green peppers and fried egg.

Círculo Taurino *($$, C/ Manuel María de Arjona 1, ☎ 95 748 18 62)* is crowded every evening except Sunday for its *tapas* and *raciones*. There is a wide assortment to choose from, including *alcachofas rellenas* (stuffed artichoke hearts), Iberian *embutidos* (sausages) and fried cod and calamari. Do not fail to try the *salmorejo*, a thick gazpacho typical of Córdoba that is generally eaten with bread rather than with a spoon.

Taberna Santa Clara *($-$$, C/ Osio 2, ☎ 95 747 95 59)* serves an affordable *menu del día* inside an old house in the Jewish quarter or outside on its garden patio. Though you won't find *rabo de toro* (stewed ox tail) among the choices for 12€, there is an option for *salmorejo* as an appetizer. After that, some version of chicken will probably be served. Every *menu del día* ends with the same things: dessert, bread, and wine or water.

El Soniquete *(C/ Lineros 6)* is part *taberna* (ground floor) and part disco (second floor). The clientele is made up of young locals that dig loud music and cheap *tapas*. The disco doesn't hop until the AM, well after the eating has stopped.

■ Excursions from Córdoba

Parque Natural de Las Sierras Subbéticas

In the south of the Córdoba province on the northwestern flanks of Andalucía's Sistema Subbética Mountains, the Parque Natural de Las Sierras Subbéticas is a rolling, semi-mountainous region of Mediterranean vegetation and peculiarly shaped limestone outcroppings. There are numerous opportunities for mountaineering, climbing and mountain biking in this karst landscape of crags, fissures and deep chasms.

In the lower elevations, the park is colored with forests of holm and gall oaks, maples and the poplars that have sprung up along the Bailón and Palancar rivers. These waterways wind through the park, harboring little Miller's shrews. Valleys are strewn with small white villages and mottled with olive groves. Wild boar, hares and peregrine falcons are a common sight and, to a lesser extent, foxes, hedgehogs and ferrets. Other flying predators, including the griffon vulture, share air-space with an assortment of song birds, cuckoos, bee-eaters, partridges, swifts and occasionally humans defying the laws of gravity.

Park Information

To get here from Córdoba, take the N-432 south to Luque. The three main entrances to the park are from the towns of Cabra in the west, Luque in the north, and Priego de Córdoba in the east. All have tourism offices with maps of hiking trails and points of interest, which range from ruined castles to the *cueva de los Murciélagos* (cave) near Luque, to the *Embalse de Iznájar* (reservoir), just south of the park's border. Contact the **Visitors Center** at Centro de Visitantes del Parque Natural de la Sierra Subbética, ☎ 95 770 41 06.

Adventures on Foot

Speleologists make for La Sima de Cabra in the northwest of the park, best accessed from the town of Cabra. **Climbers** prefer La Tiñosa in the southeast of the park. This spot is best reached from the village of Jaula, accessible via the road from Priego de Córdoba. From Jaula it is a five-km (3.1-mile) hike south to the crag. Best to contact or hire **Aventura Vertical** in Lucena *(Urbanización Álvarez Quintero, Edificio Los Piropos 3, ☎ 95 751 00 33/64 911 61 47).* The two instructors are members and teachers of La Federación Andaluza de Montaña, a regional club dedicated to mountain adventure sports. A refresher course will cost 12€. To spend a couple of days climbing in the park with equipment and guides runs 36€ per person.

La Vía Verde La Subbética is part of a government project to put abandoned rail lines to use for walkers and bikers. Along these routes cars and motorcycles are strictly prohibited. The trail begins in the village of Las Navas del Selpillar southwest of the park and terminates just past Luque in the north of the park. The route is roughly 50 km (31 miles) long, heavily signposted and equipped with rest areas and information panels concerning nature along the way. Old rail tunnels and aqueducts are common sights, as are bridges fording rivers, clear-water lagoons and small, cute chapels. Five villages – Lucena, Cabra, Doña Mencía and Zuheros – have accommodations and restaurants between the trail's two endpoints.

Adventures on Wheels

In Cabra, **Aguisub** *(Avda Federico García Lorca 10, ☎ 61 905 54 80)* rents mountain bikes in addition to their guided hiking excursions into the park (60€ per person per day). Most of the biking trails through the park are either on paved roads that rarely see a car or on unpaved roads and smaller trails. With a map, it's easy to follow the signs to the next village in the park. From Cabra, you could take the C-336 east for seven km (4.4 miles) to the village of Mojón Alto inside the park. This road is paved through a valley with only slight up and down grades. By continuing east through the heart of the park for another seven km (4.3 miles), you'll pass over two arms of the Palancar River and then can pick up the unpaved road north that is signposted to Luque, the village on the park's northern edge. From here the route is increasingly difficult until you cross a peak in roughly eight km (five miles) and coast the same distance into town after a good three hours of peddling.

Adventures on Horseback

Actividades Ecuestres de la Subbética *(C/ San Marcos 70, ☎ 95 754 70 30)* operates from a small farm near Priego de Córdoba in the eastern realm of the park. An hour-long horseback ride over a modest peak and through olive groves costs 12€. They also have a handful of bikes on hand, though an avid rider would think more than twice about paying 9€ for an hour's jaunt.

Adventures in the Air

In Rute, a village on the southwestern border of the park, **Cirros Sur** *(Finca Villa Oliva, Ctra Lucena-Rute, km 19, ☎ 95 753 82 80, cirrossur@eresmas.net)* is run by a duo that spends their free time shooting high-altitude adventure video documentaries. Depending on the thermals, they'll launch **paragliding** forays through the park from any of a number of peaks. The bird is a two-seater, so you'll be accompanied by one of the guides for the 15-30 minute flight (25€).

Camping

West of Priego de Córdoba, **Los Villares** *(Carretera Carcabuey-Rute, km 6, ☎ 95 770 40 54)* is a small campground with a capacity for only 90 people and no facilities. Individuals are charged 2.24€ plus the same amount for tent space or 1.96€ for cars. In Carcabuey on the eastern edge of the park, **Las Palomas** *(Carretera Carcabuey-Zagrilla, km 5, ☎ 95 772 00 02)* is another small campground but

with more facilities, including showers, a restaurant, electricity and gas hook-ups and telephone. Adults are charged 2.24€. Tent space is another 2.50€ and cars and trailers cost 2.24€ and 2.81€ respectively.

■ Cádiz to Tárifa Along the Costa de la Luz

There is a stretch of southern coast in Spain where beaches are clean and the seawall is not an endless row of high-rise apartments, but natural sand and stone, where beachgoers come for the sport of the Atlantic surf and for solitude. Cádiz, Western Europe's oldest city, is the starting point of this trip into old-south Spain or, depending on your location, Tárifa, Europe's southernmost city. These bookends are two of Spain's cheeriest costal cities, capable of satisfying an aging historian as well as a bare-chested, board-toting 20-something.

Cádiz

■ History

Cádiz is the capital of the province that spans southward from the Sevilla plains and the western foothills of the Serranía de Ronda to claim the last sweep of the Mediterranean coast. To the west at the Straight of Gibraltar the water merges with the Atlantic and from there carries on, well past Cádiz and Jerez de la Frontera at the edge of the provincial boundary. For 3,000 years the city has served its seafaring purpose, first established as the Phoenician settlement of Gadir in the ninth century BC, before passing into the hands of the Carthaginians and, after the Second Punic War, the Romans, who called it Gades.

In the fifth century AD, the Byzantine Empire captured the city and lost it one hundred years later to the Visigoths, whose hold was even shakier and collapsed with the arrival of the Moors in 711. Jeziret Kadis, as it came to be known until the Christians seized the city in 1262 under Alfonso X, was a crucial port of entry for the Muslims arriving from North Africa. About 100 km (62 miles) to the east, the Moors maintained their hold over Gibraltar until 1461, just a few years before the Christian Reconquest was declared a success in a fortress on a hill in Granada. Gibraltar was the Moors' last line of defense. When it fell, Algeciras quickly followed, severing the Moors' crucial link to North African support.

The neighboring Puerto de Santa María, just west of Cádiz, saw its stock improve as a busy naval center during the discoveries of the New World. Columbus had his *Niña*, *Pínta* and his *Santa María* when he set sail for the Indies in 1492. The port at Cádiz and the inland port on the Guadalquivir River in Sevilla benefited tremendously from the wealth that arrived on treasure ships returning from the New World.

Once the Guadalquivir had silted up to the point that barges could no longer reach Sevilla, Cádiz became the leading Spanish port. Commerce flourished and the Spanish monopoly on trade with the new lands soon spurred English attacks in the late 16th century; Sir Francis Drake succeeded in burning the city of Cádiz; Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, returned to destroy the harbor 10 years later. The ongoing feud lasted into the 19th century, during the course of which Gibraltar was awarded to England; it has remained one of its provinces since, despite failed Spanish attempts to reclaim it. Later,

England would side with Spain and protect this stretch of coast from seizure by the French during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century.

Once Spain had lost its American colonies, Cádiz diminished in significance and hard times lay ahead. The Spanish Civil War passed through the area quickly and with minimal incident; in the ensuing years, though, Cádiz continued to struggle with increasing poverty that today has burdened the area with one of Spain's highest unemployment rates. But happiness is not necessarily tied to work. Cádiz in February, when the country's wildest celebration of Carnaval is at full throttle, is the happiest place in Spain. And how could I forget to mention that Cádiz has the prettiest women in the country? Just ask any Spaniard.

■ Useful Information

The two **tourism offices** are within a block of each other just off the main Plaza San Juan de Dios: **Oficina Municipal** *(Pl. San Juan de Dios 11, ☎ 95 624 10 01)* and **Junta de Andalucía** *(Avda Ramón de Carranza, ☎ 95 625 86 46)*.

Yachting Marinas

Puerto América *(☎ 956 22 42 20)*.

Real Club Náutico de Cádiz *(☎ 95 621 32 62)*.

Sailing

Club de Vela, escuela superior de Marina Civil *(Avda Duque de Nájera, s/n, ☎ 95 622 24 00)*.

Comisión Gral. De Regatas *(Punta San Felipe, s/n, ☎ 95 621 24 15)*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: For rail travel, the Estación de Ferrocarriles *(Plaza Sevilla, s/n, ☎ 95 625 10 01)* is in the old city. Ten or more trains run daily to **Sevilla** (2½ hours); four trains go to **Córdoba** (three hours); and two or three go to **Madrid** (five hours) and **Barcelona** (15+ more hours).

By Bus: The Estación Autobuses Comes *(☎ 95 680 70 59)* is in Plaza de la Hispanidad just west of the commercial port near Plaza de España. Daily connections to: **Sevilla** (10 or more, 2½ hours); **Córdoba** (one-two per day, 4½ hours); **Málaga** (five or more, four hours); **Granada** (two-four per day, seven hours); **Tárifa** (eight or more, 1½ hours). To get to **Madrid** (five or more per day, 7½ hours), head to the Estación Autobuses Los Amarillos *(Avda Ramón de Carranza 31, ☎ 95 628 58 52)*, mid-way between the Puerta de Tierra (gate) and the Puerto Comercial (port).

By Car: From **Madrid**, take the N-IV south, through **Córdoba** to **Sevilla**, and from there choose either the N-IV or A-4, both of which head south to Cádiz. From **Tárifa**, the fastest route is via the N-340/E-15 heading west. A more scenic, albeit slower, route runs south of the N-340/E-15 highway and consists of narrow, sometimes weather-beaten country roads. The route runs along the coast or nearby, passing a number of interesting villages and sights. While it's relatively well signposted, you'll want a map on hand to differentiate between the roads that sometimes veer off only to dead-end a few miles later, and those that lead to the next town en route to Cádiz. The same roads

continue from Tárifa to and from Málaga. From **Granada**, head west on the A-92 and at Antequera continue in that direction by picking up the A-382, which feeds into the N-IV and A-4 just north of Cádiz at Jerez de la Frontera.

■ Orientation

"Viva Cádiz, Silver Cádiz,
Whose walls defy the sea,
Cádiz of the pretty girls,
Of courtesy and glee!
Good luck to the Merry Cádiz,
As white as ocean spray,
And her five and twenty cannon
That point Gibraltar way!"

Local anthem

Cádiz claims a narrow peninsula that widens out at the end like a Q-tip. The old city is at this wide end, through the 17th century gate known as the **Puerta de Tierra**, past what remains of the fortified walls. New Cádiz has built up along the narrow stretch of peninsula connecting it to the continent and leading into the old area via the busy Avda Juan Carlos I. It can be a disheartening sight – 18- and 20-floor apartment buildings crowding both sides of the road. On the inland side is the Bay of Cádiz and on the other, the beach, but you wouldn't know it driving or walking down the middle. Cut over and walk along the **Playa de Santa María del Mar** and **Playa de la Victoria**, long and summer-time crowded sandy beaches with any number of cheap eateries and international bars across the sea wall. Occasionally the surf picks up enough to catch a wave, but most prefer to head farther east along the coast for that.

■ Sightseeing

In the old city, **Plaza de San Juan Dios** is the main hub of activity, handsome with palms and views of the bay. To reach the city's favorite monument, follow C/ Pelota past the white Neo-classical *Ayuntamiento* (town hall). The 18th-century **Cathedral of Cádiz** is a glowing example of what colonial riches can do for a city if put to good local use rather than squandered on foreign enterprises. When Cádiz became the leading port of commerce with the New World, work on the Cathedral began. In the 100 years that it took to complete, the original Baroque styling slowly caved to a more monetarily efficient Neo-classical styling as trade waned. The edifice is topped with a beautiful dome decorated with glazed yellow tiles. Inside, the cathedral is a rich treasury and the tomb of the famous 20th-century Cádiz-born composer Manuel de Falla. Among his piano and orchestral works, *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* (The Three-Cornered Hat) and *Noches en Los Jardines de España* (Nights in the Gardens of Spain) are revered masterworks with strong roots in the Andalucían folk life. *(Open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-12:45 pm and 4:30-6:45 pm, Sat. 10 am-12:45 pm; fee 3€ includes entry to the cathedral's museum.)*

From the Cathedral it is easy to pick up the walking path along Cádiz' old fortified seawall. This circuit rounds the city and is a perfect spot for leisurely

paseos. You'll pass the **Castillo de San Sebastián** and what's left of the **Playa de la Caleta** that the sea hasn't swept away and the many small, colorful tuna boats haven't crowded out. On the far end of the beach is the **Castilla Santa Catalina** and, a short distance beyond, the city's lush **Parque Genovés**, with imported trees and sparkling fountains hemmed by trails and prickly green hedges. Along the walk, ancient homes face the water with colorful blue, yellow and peak façades. Occasionally, the sea will crash into the 20-foot-high brick seawalls and send water cascading over the battlements and onto the walks. Mind the camera. From the park on, the stroll is shaded by palms and other Mediterranean foliage. It takes a little more than 30 minutes to complete the loop of the old city and return to the Plaza San Juan de Dios.

From the main plaza, the best thing to do is get lost in the narrow, winding maze of the old city, find the charming Plaza de las Flores and the Plaza de la Candelaría for a rest; appreciate carelessly situated streets and the old architecture that has survived the earthquakes and naval sieges that took much of the city with them.

For culture, visit the **Mueso de Cádiz** *(Plaza de la Mina, ☎ 95 621 22 81, open Tues. 9:30 am-8 pm, Wed.-Sat. 9 am-8 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm; entry fee 1.50€),* with its interesting blend of high-art and archeological treasures. On display is an impressive collection of Phoenician and Roman relics, sarcophagi, headdresses, and a worthy collection of paintings by Zurbarán, Murillo and other Spanish masters. From there, take C/ Sagasta to the Plaza de San Felipe Neri, with the **Oratorio de San Felipe Neri** *(open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm, entry fee 1.20€)*. Spain's first constitution was drawn up in this building by a special parliament convened during the Napoleonic invasion from 1810-1812. The restoration of the monarchy in 1814, however, rendered the document relatively useless and hastened a three-year face-off between the city's liberal leaders and the capital of Madrid. During this "Triennium," plans were made to invade Madrid and restore the new, more favorable laws, but these were eventually abandoned, just as the constitution had been previously.

■ Where to Stay

Hotel Atlántico *(C/ Duque de Nájera 9, ☎ 95 622 69 05, fax 95 621 45 82, d 80-95€)* looks like an over-sized adobe hut with its back turned to its namesake. The city's largest gardens, the Parque Genovés, adjoin the hotel and both share views of the sea. The Mudéjar-styled hotel was inaugurated in 1930 and has since become one of the government-run *paradores*. Renovations and expansions ensued. Rooms are done up in a conservative styling, with ample lighting and a perfect setting in the most colorful part of the city.

Hostal Bahía *(Plocia 5, ☎ 95 625 91 10, fax 95 625 42 08, hostalbahia@terra.es, 50€)* is pink and perky on a corner just off the Plaza San Juan de Dios. The desk attendants are informative if questioned and the new furniture is comfortable. All of the rooms have private bath, television, air conditioning and some have small balconies overlooking the ornamental street below.

Pensión Marqués *(C/ Marqués de Cádiz 1, ☎ 95 628 58 54, d 27€)* has 11 clean rooms that have been given the rework, along with four shared bath-

rooms. The middle-of-the-night walk down the hall to the bathroom won't leave the bottom of your feet the color of coal, at least. Air conditioning is sadly missed.

Alberque Juvenil Quo Qádis *(C/ Diego Arias 1, ☎ 95 622 19 39, s 6€ in communal rooms, d 25€ in semi-private rooms w/ breakfast)* is a youth hostel a short walk from Playa de La Caleta in the old city. A young, multi-cultural crowd keeps the place lively; scrappers love the cheap meals (vegetarian dishes available) and the cruiser bikes for rent.

■ What to Eat & Where

El Faro *($$$, C/ San Félix 15, ☎ 90 221 10 68)* is recognized for its seafood and for having been around long enough to qualify as the city's classic restaurant. At the helm, Gonzalo Córdoba will stop by the table when he's not running this tight ship. For starters, try the house salad tossed with veggies, melon and prawns. Filets of fish and prawns constitute the main dishes, along with a few different seafood stews (*guisos marineros*). Fried (*frito* or *a la romana*) and grilled (*a la espalda*, with a garlic and parsley sauce in this case) are the most common fish preparations. Don't hesitate to hit-up this restaurant for *tapas*, as they are some of the best to be had in town.

Restaurante San Antonio *($$, Plaza San Antonio)* is another of Cádiz' dependable local institutions. The space is traditional, a long, narrow *comedor* (dining room) just past a small entry area with bar, white tablecloths and stained wood paneling. The menu consists of cuisine favored by *Gaditano*s (natives of Cádiz), with tender *solomillos* (sirloins) of pork and veal, gazpacho soup in the summertime, fried fish and *pescado a la roteña* (a stew of fish with peppers, onions and tomatoes). Next door is the **Café Bar Andaluz**, packed with Spaniards overflowing into the plaza at midday for *tapas*. A cheaper alternative in the Barrio de La Viña near El Faro, but still satisfactory, is **Mesón Criollo** *($-$$, at the intersection of C/ Palma and C/ Lubet, ☎ 95 622 71 27).* The *menu del día* is 15€ or less, with options for Argentinean-style beef (filet is *bife*; barbecued is *churrasco*) or a healthy sampling of bay seafood.

■ Nightlife

The streets running between the Plaza de Mira, Plaza de San Francisco and the Plaza de España are known for their nightlife. **La Cava** *(C/ Antonio López 16)* is small like most of the bars in this area, with nightly flamenco shows. **Viva!** *(reservations ☎ 65 069 05 21)* organizes *tapas* tours in the city for 20€, which includes three *tapas* and three drinks. The group meets at the fountain in Plaza de San Francisco, Mon., Tues. and Wed. at 7:45 (5% of the profits are donated to the ongoing clean-up effort of the *Prestige* oil-spill in northwestern Spain).

Outside of the old city along the beaches in the new part, a number of clubs and Irish bars pick up the pace in the summer. Just look for the Guiness signs and the glossy pictures of English breakfasts. For "free" drinks that aren't really free, consider heading to El Puerto de Santa Maria, just across the bay from Cádiz. **El Casino Bahia de Cádiz** *(Ctra Madrid-Cádiz, km 649, ☎ 95 687 10 42)* is a riotous affair in a sprawling white building looking more like a fortress than a place to lose money. Besides roulette, blackjack and craps,

there is a disco and, on the weekends, elaborately tasteless dance spectaculars. Beach attire is generally frowned upon.

Carnaval

There is no better excuse to sleep on the beach than during February's Carnaval celebrations in Cádiz. Clowns, drag queens and topless beauties dance and shake through glittering parades day and night. These *murgas*, as each group is known, will end up at the Gran Teatro Falla, where a panel of judges is charged with rewarding their outlandishness. In the interim, roaming bands of pitifully hilarious street musicians known as *charangas* bump through the streets, playing occasionally between drinks. Costumes and masks, at the least, are a prerequisite in attire and tend toward the devilish or grotesque. For 10 days hedonism reigns supreme and the best areas to partake of it are in the old city. Paper fliers announcing verious entertainment events will be as prevalent as confetti. Available hotel rooms, on the other hand, will be scarce – which is why Carnival, among young foreigners, is a popular excuse to sleep on the beach, if sleep ever comes.

Costa de la Luz

■ A Southern Detour

From Cádiz, it takes a little over an hour to reach Tárifa via the highway. It's a swift, picture-taking route winding through valleys, salt flats and pinegroves, but it neglects the Costa de la Luz to the south. To experience the relatively unspoiled beaches along this way requires some detours. Pass through Chiclana de la Frontera, a shiny white village in the marshes east of Cádiz, and a few kilometers down the road turn off at the signs for Conil de la Frontera. From here, you'll be able to follow the coast as far as Zahara de los Atunes.

Conil de la Frontera is a fishing village turned summer resort town with upwards of 18,000 people in the high season. One difference you'll notice here is that Spaniards, rather than foreigners, are the main tourists. English menus are still hard to come by and campsites outnumber resort hotels. A shear cliff drops 100 feet before the sea south of the town. Two beaches, **Playa El Roqueo** and **Playa La Fontanilla**, are sandwiched in-between the rise and the waves with fine sand and modest surf.

From Conil it is a beautiful meadow drive to **El Palmar**, with mountains silhouetted to the west and the far-off view of the windmills above Tárifa dead ahead. Be careful not to miss the turn-off; a small wooden sign indicates the gravel road that leads into the small village. **La Playa El Palmar** is touted as the best **surfing** destination on the southern Atlantic Coast. If you haven't rented a board in Cádiz or Tárifa, or brought your own, ask one of the locals if you can rent his or her board for an hour or so. This strategy works more times than not, although you'll likely have to wait until the best condi-

tions have passed. In the meantime, settle in at **La Chanca**, a beachside bar and restaurant in a former livery with the niftiest grass terrace and tables with thatched shades. Head out of the village the same way you came in; the alternative is a rough, pot-holed road that seems to lead somewhere but doesn't.

Just east of Palmar is the beach known locally as **Faro**, the other hyped **surfing** spot – completely solitary save for the pile-up of caravans that have brought surfers on its dirt road.

Just before arriving into Los Caños de Meca on its only street, the Avda de Trafalgar, you'll pass the Cabo de Trafalgar, with its lighthouse indicating the spot where the English Admiral Horatio Nelson defeated the Spanish/Napoleon naval fleet in 1805, a battle the famed commander did not survive.

It's a spring green stretch of road to **Los Caños de Meca**. Caños has long been characterized as a hippie enclave. Stroll the strip and you'll hear congas, be offered hemp creations and marvel at the many strange ways modern-day hippies can arrange their hair. The town is situated at the base of a pine-covered hill claimed by the **Parque Natural Brena y Marismas del Barbate**. In leaving Los Caños, the road ascends through this natural park, with terrific views of the town and the ocean below. On its rim, sheer cliffs of pale white, striated sandstone rise in places over 90 m (300 feet) above the water. An even, green canopy of stone pines blankets the park in its entirety. In descending from this natural area, the port town of Barbete comes into view. Forego this shady town of thieves, beggars, drug smugglers and other contemptible characters. Press on down the coast, past the men fishing in the marshes, to **Zahara de Los Atunes**.

The ruins of a defunct tuna factory pay tribute to this small village's past. Though the nets are now unloaded in nearby Barbete, Zahara de Los Atunes thrives on its reputation as a once-bustling fishing village. People come to eat delicious seafood and stroll through the handsome streets. Some manage to discover the enchanting bay of Atlanterra on a dead-end road east through town. There is little else to do in this spot; just a serene setting in which to appreciate an untainted piece of Spain's coast.

■ Tárifa

> *"At the highest point in Tárifa there is an old fort, built by the Moors. From atop its walls, one can catch a glimpse of Africa."* Paul Coelho, *The Alchemist*

The metal forest of wind turbines on the hill above Tárifa is the first indication of what the whitewashed town on the southernmost tip of Western Europe holds in store. From its beach, Playa de Los Lances, the hills of northern Africa are visible 17 km (11 miles) away across the Straights of Gibraltar. The phenomenon that has established Tárifa as the "world capital of windsurfing" is the work of the fierce easterlies known as the *levante* and, in the summer, the western winds known as the *poniente*. The latter is preferred by the water junkies, many of whom are in the process of trashing or, less likely, selling their windsurfing equipment to buy a kiteboarding rig. Rarely does one or the other of the winds let up. Beach readers and sunbathers be fore-

warned: the conditions in Tárifa are enough to drive a man crazy (according to the locals, Tárifa has the highest suicide rate in Spain). But a calm respite can be had in the city's chill old neighborhood, considerately laid out by the Moors over 800 years ago. In fact, the entire town is laid-back and happy, a mix of young out-of-towners in board shorts and flops and locals that don't seem to mind the reputation Tárifa has acquired. If it were still cool to use the word "cool," Tárifa would earn the description.

Getting Here & Away

By Bus: Up to 10 daily buses depart from **Comes** *(C/ Batallo del Salado, ☎ 95 668 40 38)* to **Cádiz** and one to two per day to **Málaga**, **Sevilla** and **Granada**.

By Car: From **Cádiz** by car, the N-340/E-15 runs east along the coast to Tárifa; from **Málaga**, take the same road west. From **Sevilla**, the A-381 can be picked up in Jerez de la Frontera from the A-4.

Adventures on Water

The Straight of Gibraltar harbors a significant number of marine mammals, including three species of dolphin, sperm, orca and pilot whales. To subsidize their research, a number of small marine biology teams offer **whale watching** boat tours on a daily basis. The trips generally cost between 25€ and 50€ for two to three hours on 25-foot pontoon boats. Book with **FIRMM** *(Foundation for information and research on marine mammals, C/ Pedro Cortés 4, ☎ 95 662 70 08, www.firmm.org)*. Other options are **Whale Watch España** *(Avda de la Constitución 6, ☎ 95 662 70 13, www.whalewatchtarifa.com)* or **Mar de Ballenas** *(C/ Batallo del Salado, Urb. El Recreo, ☎ 95 668 22 53)*. In the event that nothing breaks the surface, a later trip will usually be arranged at no additional charge. To look beneath the surface, **Turamares** *(☎ 69 644 83 49, www.turmares.com)* offers sea trips on a large glass-bottom boat.

Tárifa has two certified **scuba diving** shops and on most days, clear water conditions where the Mediterranean and Atlantic meet. Two of the more popular underwater destinations are **La Isla de Las Palomas**, an island that serves as a military base above the surface and home to numerous bream and moray eels below, and **Punta Marroqui**, which is known for its strong currents that can carry divers along sheer underwater cliffs at sport-diving depths. When the conditions aren't ripe for the latter, there is a bounty of ancient shipwrecks that are rich with marine life, but no longer with gold. A single dive costs 25€; certification courses run between two and seven days and cost 300€ or more. Contact **Buceo Tárifa Diving** *(Avda de la Constitución 10, ☎ 95 668 19 25)*; or **Centro de Buceo Scorpora** *(Avda de las Fuerzas Armadas, s/n, ☎ 63 911 72 96, scorpora@arrakis.com)*.

Windsurfers and kiteboarders prefer the conditions west of Tárifa off the Punta Paloma, an area known as **El Porro** along the Playa de Valdevaqueros. There is a large swath of windblown beach banked by a sand dune and crowded with boarders setting up, learning, practicing, or just getting dragged through the sand. The frothy water is crowded with colorful kites and windsails. Though generally not as territorial as surfers who are

dependent on a particular spot where the break is on, the athletes that venture into the water for these sports know the ropes and how to handle a heavily crowded piece of water. Don't expect much wet time here in the summer when the international competitions are underway. Even if you have wakeboarded or surfed before, kiteboarding is an entirely different beast; it's a crossover sport, sure, but with it the athlete is at the mercy of unpredictable wind gusts and surrounding vegetation (more than one person has been blown off-course, onto the banks and into a very unforgiving tree trunk).

Tárifa is loaded with **surfing schools**, many of which are based in the surf shops along the main drag in town, C/ Batalla del Salado – or at least the shops have information on the schools. Most of the shops don't open until March. Expect to pay 100-200€ for a two-day beginner course. Refresher courses or those of shorter duration cost around 60€ per hour. You'll learn the equipment, how to gauge weather conditions, maneuver the kite with and without a harness, sail and maybe fly high. With a modicum of experience, equipment can be rented per hour (15€) or per day (60€). Among the many schools/repair-shops/rental houses are **Wipika** *(C/ Batalla del Salado 28, ☎ 95 662 70 05)*, **Art of Surfing** *(C/ Batalla del Salado 47, ☎ 95 668 52 04)* and **X-Kite** *(C/ San José 19, ☎ 95 662 72 74)*. **Club Mistral Hurricane** *(Ctra Cádiz-Cádiz, km 70, ☎ 95 668 49 40, info@tarifaspinout.com)*, with 15 years experience, has staying power in the saturated surf market of Tárifa. Rentals cost 50€ per day and a six-hour learner's course spread over three days costs 145€ (windsurf) or 200€ (kiteboard).

Where to Stay, Eat & Hang Out

Hotel Dos Mares *(Carretera Nacional 340, km 78, ☎ 95 668 40 35, fax 95 668 10 78, hoteldosmares@cherrytel.com)* is a stylish beach resort a few kilometers west of town; hidden in a leafy stretch of sand with nothing much around, the red and yellow stucco enclave has the look and feel of an all-inclusive retreat on a faraway tropical beach. Private bungalows, smaller cabañas or rooms in the main hotel can be rented for 75€ in the off-season and 110€ during July and August. There is a poolside bar, a windsurfing school, a soccer field, gym, equestrian center and a lot of empty water.

Hostal Tarik *(San Sebastián 19, ☎ 95 668 06 43, d 25-30€)* fronts nice Moroccan-styled rooms just one street off the main surf shop district, a few blocks from the water and as many blocks to the old part of town.

To stay as close to the water as possible, try **Pension Alameda** *(C/ Santísima Trinidad 7, ☎ 95 668 11 81, d 50€)* on the plaza of the same name. The rooms are bright and clean, as good as many one- or two-star hotels. The reception doubles as a bar in the downstairs restaurant.

La Tabla Pizzería Italiana *(Paseo Huerta del Rey)* spins the best pizzas in town, and possibly in the whole of Andalucía. They're misshapen, loaded with the toppings and usually too big for any one person. After dinner, stop in to the store next door indicated by the Mercería sign. It's no longer a dry-goods store, but a curio shop with Indian shawls and menacing wooden carvings from Indonesia, all collected by a big British chap named John. John fell in love with the town 20 years ago and never left, so it goes. He splits his time between his caravan on the windsurfing beach of Punta Paloma and his

apartment in the old town, just around the corner from the best little steakhouse in Spain.

I never would have found **Vaca Loca** *(C/ Cérvantes)* had it not been for John's ravishing appetite and his selfless attempt to show me the best of the town from the back of his Yamaha street bike. The little *taberna* is relatively new, with a short bar, a couple of barstools and a few tables outside in the small *plazeta* it has helped to revive (read Moroccan shops and competing restaurants). The owner, a young British man that married a pretty local lady, spent eight months designing the place, knocking out walls, putting new ones in, dragging a 400 lb rock from a nearby mountain to serve as a table. It's a homely dive with character, and the *chuleta de ternera* (a thick, juicy steak) grilled to perfection on an inset barbecue with sautéed veggies and salad is a steal at 15€. Those who dislike mear can choose from a short list of vegetarian and seafood dishes.

Walk out of Vaca Loca and hang a left. At the intersection of C/ Cervantes and C/ San Francisco, straight ahead, is a nameless bar identifiable by the wooden door swung wide open and plastered with flyers and stickers. It serves up 1€ *tapas* enriched with Roquefort cheese in a hippiefied setting. The place seems small until you follow the hall to the back, where it opens up into a series of casual dining rooms where dinner is served until 11 pm.

Head in the opposite direction out of Vaca Loca and hang a right on C/ Camiceria to share drinks in a walled, open-air courtyard just ahead on the corner. Names are hard to come by in this town. When I asked the bartender what the place was called, because it *was* an enjoyable spot to sip a *cuba libra*, she merely shrugged and said it used to be called the *Tetería*, she thought.

Cafe Misiana *(C/ El Bravo)* is a chic lounge in a town that seems far from it. Lights are turned down low, with neon glowing out the window and sippers enjoying cushy chairs in the early evening. The bar occupies the first floor of the **Hotel Misiona** *(C/ Sancho IV el Bravo, ☎ 95 662 70 83, fax 95 662 70 83, reserves@misiana.com, d 70€)*, a tall, narrow, startling white edifice with a spooky red sign. A beautiful Spanish actress is said to own the place, and to make occasional appearances when she is in town. Rooms are posh and the scene outside is lively on the weekends.

The owner of **Restaurante Morilla** *(C/ Sancho IV el Bravo 2)* drives to Algeciras to cut his own fish. Down the street, **Café Central** *(C/ Sancho IV el Bravo)* is a sprightly yellow place with terrace tables set out before the cathedral across the street. The café serves a 9€ *menu del día* and good coffee and fresh squeezed orange juice in the morning.

Camping

Two campgrounds are located off the winding, forested road that leads to the Playa de Valdevaqueros from the N-340. **El Jardín de Las Dunas** *(Los Algarves-Punta Paloma, ☎ 95 623 64 36)* is closest to the water and in a desirable setting. **Paloma** *(N-340, km 70-Los Algarves, ☎ 95 668 42 03)* has a capacity for more people and better facilities. Both have supermarkets, restaurants, swimming pools, showers and bungalows for rent. An adult costs 4.50€ plus 2.52€ for a tent or car space.

Nightlife

To feel it, feel it, feel it all night long, make for **Disco La Jaima** *(Playa de los Lances)*, an open-air club near the beach that only opens in the summer. Locals know about the place, as they do **Disco Tanakas** *(Plaza de San Hiscio)*, another of the preferred dancing spots. **Soul Café** *(C/ Trinidad)* is packed and steamy with a techno-happy, mixed crowd of locals and tourists. Upstairs is **La Ruina**, less a disco but still prone to bar-top dancers. The name means the ruin, and if you look around you'll see some very old brick arches. But who's lookingi? A long, long bar keeps the drinks flowing and makes the narrow, narrow pedestrian zones crowded.

Getting to Morocco

Along with Algeciras, Tárifa is a main embarkation point for ferries leaving for and arriving from Morocco. It takes 35 minutes to reach Tangier, a seedy port town in Morocco that should be passed through as quickly as possible if you have a few days to spend in Africa. It's a wild, exotic land with great food (*tajine* and *couscous*) and cheap accommodations. In Tangiers, expect the people crowding the port to be forward, perhaps over-bearing and quite possibly ill-intentioned. Expect great things from the rest of the country. For short one- or two-day trips, it's possible to arrange a guide with the ferry service, with transportation to and from the city and lunch included (50€ includes the ferry ride). The trip alone costs 22€, with departures from Tárifa's port Mon.-Sat. and Sun. at 11:30 am and 6 pm, Fri. 11:30 am and 7 pm; departures from Tangiers take place Mon.-Sat. and Sun. at 9:15 am and 6:30 pm and Fri. at 9:15 am and 7 pm. Though ferries are not usually full in Tárifa, it is advisable to book at least a day in advance at the port or by calling **FRS** *(☎ 95 668 18 30 in Tárifa, (212) 399 42 612 in Tanger, www.frs.es, info@frs.es)*.

Sierra de Grazalema & Its White Villages

On most days it will be raining in the natural park of the Sierra de Grazalema. Situated along the northeastern boundary of the Cádiz province with Málaga, the reserve's 45,000 mountainous hectares (127,000 acres) receive an average of 210 cm (82 inches) of rainfall per year, making it the Iberian Peninsula's rainiest zone. The predominance of a crumbly, calciferous rock that is given easily to erosion has resulted in a landscape of chasms, canyons, caves, crags and jagged peaks. It *was* a good place for *bandoleros* to hide out in between their thieving forays on the nearby trading routes. Now it is a good place for outdoor sports, well known to rock climbers and paragliders, no less disappointing to those who just want to keep to their feet or pedals.

The forests of Spanish fir, which have survived here and in three other neighboring areas since the Tertiary period, attract nature lovers. These *pinsapo* trees grow at altitudes from 1,000 to 1,500 m (3,200-4,800 feet) and are most noteworthy along the northern slopes of the Sierra de Torreón (1,654 m/5,293 feet). The grazalema poppy, a deep red, tubular flower, is common in the more humid confines of the park and the small saxifrage, another endemic species, sprouts its five white petals in cracks and fractures. The rains encourage ferns; the cliffs harbor a large population of griffon vultures and eagles, caves

are embellished with prehistoric art and the southern heat mandates that the villages inside the park be coated in white.

Grazalema, Zaharra de la Sierra and El Bosque, three of these pasty white settlements, fall along the popular Andalucían route of the white villages spanning the provinces of Cádiz and Málaga. They are rural, serene and of a simple appearance not all that different than when the Moors laid them out 800 and more years ago. It was in and near these villages that the Christians and the Moors waged their final battles before Granada, and the country, was conceded to the Catholic monarchs in 1492. Accommodations, park information and a down-home experience can be had in each before venturing into the surrounding park. As Robert Packard wrote in *The New York Times,* "Ablaze in the sunlight, ashen under moonlit skies, the towns make few concessions to tourism. And like rare gems, their settings embellish them."

> **Be Forewarned:** Areas of the park are restricted. To gain access, you'll have to arrange with the local tourism offices in any of the villages to get a free pass. In most cases this can be handled on the spot. To be absolutely certain of gaining access, call ahead to the Agencio del Medio Ambiante, ☎ 95 671 60 63 or 95 671 62 36.

■ Getting to the Park

By Bus: Two daily buses run to **Sevilla** and **Cádiz** from the Plaza de la Constitución in the village of El Bosque. Up to seven per day run to Jerez de la Frontera.

By Car: From **Sevilla**, take the A-473 south to its intersection with the A-382 and on the A-382 head east. At Algodonales, turn off and follow the signs to Grazalema. This village in the center of the park can be reached from the east or west via the C-344. If coming from **Cádiz**, take the N-IV/A-4 north to Jerez de la Frontera and pick up the A-382 northeast to Arcos de la Frontera, where the C-344 connects the park to the east. From all other directions, the city of Ronda is a good reference point a few kilometers east of the park on the C-344.

■ El Bosque

Tourist Information

The **Centro de Recepción de Visitantes de El Bosque** *(Avda de la Diputación, ☎ 71 60 63)* is in the lower part of the pueblo, before crossing the bridge.

El Bosque (the forest) is a traditional fresh-water fishing village on the western rim of the park. El Bosque River skirts the town, harboring rainbow trout, carp and barbel, before draining into the Embalse de los Hurones a few kilometers south. In this reservoir baitcasting for black bass and pike is the norm. In the village, a fish farm and trout hatchery shore up the local economy; a national award for preservation and visual improvement keeps it prideful.

Adventures

Paragliders and **hang gliders** prefer to use the village as a base for the nearby take-off zone of the Sierra de Albarracín, where annual competitions for the sport are held. Arrangements can be made through Horizon or Ocio Natural sports outfitters (see *Grazelama* section, below).

Hikers can follow the lush course of the Bosque River to the village of Benamahoma a few kilometers east. It's a leisurely two- to three-hour hike that can be reached by walking to the Albergue Juvenil El Bosque, the youth hostel, and crossing the bridge to the trailhead.

Horseback riding in the park is available through **Ecuestre Bosque-Sierra Sal** *(C/ Ronda 4, ☎ 95 671 62 23)*.

Where to Stay

The **Hotel Las Truchas** *(Avda Diputación, s/n, ☎ 95 671 62 23)* looks and feels like a country inn. There are 24 white, wood-beamed rooms, half of which wrap around an exterior balcony with happy views of the surrounding park. Singles cost 30.50€ and doubles 50€. The **Albergue Juvenil El Bosque** *(Molino de Enmedio, s/n, ☎ 95 671 62 12)* offers simple, shared rooms for the price it costs to fill up a Geo Tracker with regular unleaded. The **Higuerón de Tavizna Nature Center** *(Ctra El Bosque-Ubrique, Benaocaz, ☎ 95 612 55 65)* is also a youth hostel and a good source of information on the park.

Camping

Camping Tavizna *(Ctra El Bosque-Ubrique, km 5, ☎ 95 646 20 11)* is five km (3.1 miles) south of El Bosque on the CA-524. The campground is on the banks of the River Tavizna. **La Torrecilla** *(Ctra El Bosque-Ubrique, km 1, ☎ 95 671 60 95)* is a small camping site just south of town with a bar, a general stores and a few cabanas for rent. Adults are 2.85€ per night; tent spaces are 2.10€; cars are 1.80€.

■ Grazalema

Grazalema lies in the clutch of a valley between the Sierras of El Endrinal and El Pinar in the heart of the park that is named after it. The narrow zig-zag streets are the work of the Moors, who once inhabited the village and called it Ben-Zalema. Grazalema is known for its textile industry, and particularly its blankets. A visit can be made to the **Artesanía Textil de Grazalema** *(Ctra Ronda, s/n ☎ 95 613 20 08)*, where the textiles are crafted and sold.

Tourist information

Oficina del Parque Natural Sierra de Grazalema *(Las Piedras 11, ☎ 95 613 22 30)*. To visit the fir forests located between Grazalema and the village of Behamahoma to the west, you'll need a permit issued by this Agencia del Medio Ambiante. In certain cases you'll have to pay a guide to escort you.

Adventures

Two of the most popular **rock climbing** spots in the park, El Peñon Grande and El Salto de Cabrero, are located west of Grazalema. To **hike** to El Peñon

Grande follow the C-344 road west in the direction of El Bosque. At the Tajo-Rodillo campsite, pick up the steep trail that runs south, to your left. This route skirts the base of the crag and takes around an hour and a half to complete. Stretch the legs and expect to break a sweat, as this is an average hike in difficulty but above average if you're hoisting equipment.

For more information on the crags or to tackle them with an experienced guide, contact **Horizon** *(C/ Doctor Mateos Gago 12, ☎ 95 613 23 63)* or **Ocio Natural** *(C/ Empedrada 25, ☎ 95 613 23 55)*, both of which are based in Grazalema. **Aventerra Parque Natural de Aventuras** *(C/ Nacimiento, s/n, ☎ 95 672 70 19)* is another company specializing in rural tourism.

Where to Stay

Hotel Puerta de la Villa *(Plaza Pequeña 8, ☎ 95 613 23 76, fax 95 613 20 87)* has 28 fancily outfitted rooms at a pretty price of 115€ per double.

Villa Turística Grazalema *(El Olivar, s/n, ☎ 95 613 21 36)* and **Casa de las Piedras** *(C/ Las Piedras 32, ☎ 95 613 20 14)* rent rural tourism apartments (*casas rurales*).

Camping

Tajo-Rodillo *(Ctra Comarcal 344, ☎ 95 623 42 21)*, west of town, rents bikes, four-person apartments and organizes outdoor excursions. It is closed Nov. and Feb.

■ Zahara de la Sierra

Zahara de la Sierra enjoys the best natural setting of all the villages in the park. It spreads white along a gray crag that rises over the town with a sorry Arabic tower at the top. To reach the Torre del Homenage is a worthwhile endeavor managed only afoot; the views from up there are anything but sorry. You can see the reservoir of Zahara and imagine diving into it, the village of Grazalema, meadows and peaks, greens and more grays. In a larger city, a trail such as this would have already been terraced into steps. Though you will come across some on the steep walk up, expect lose cobblestones and dirt. Imagine yourself a Moor that has just helped recapture the city from the Christians in a midnight raid in 1481.

Tourist Information

Plaza del Rey 3, ☎ 95 612 31 14.

Adventures

Canyoning, or mountaineering, or canyoneering, whatever you want to call it, is undertaken in the nearby canyon known as the Garganta Verde and also at the Garganta de la Hermita (hermitage). The canyon can be reached by taking the CA-531 three km (1.8 miles) south in the direction of Grazalema. From there, a marked trail leads east to the watery depression. **Aventerra** *(Plaza Zahara 7, ☎ 95 612 31 14)* guides trips with the ropes, life-jackets and helmets you'll want and need to tackle Garganta Verde. A day-trip costs 50€. **Horizon** and **Ocio Natural** in Grazalema also make the same route.

Where to Stay

Hotel Arco de la Villa *(Plaza Nazarí, s/n, ☎ 95 612 32 54, fax 95 612 32 44)* has good rooms and some nice views of the park. Doubles cost 45-55€.

Pension Marqués de Zahara *(San Juan 3, ☎ 95 612 30 61)* has 12 rooms that aren't run down and aren't fixed up. Go figure, and check to see that they've acquired air conditioning if it is summertime. A simple double room with bath costs 30-35€.

Málaga & Environs

"My eyes always see you, city of my days beside the sea.
Hanging from the towering mountain's side and scarcely,
In your headlong plunge toward the sea detained,
You seem to reign beneath the sky, over the waters,
Half suspended in the air, as if a providential hand
Had held you back, a moment of glory before it cast you for all time,
Into the loving waves."

Vicente Aleixandre*, City of Paradise*

It doesn't take a professional photographer to capture the impressive picture so often shown on postcards of Málaga. Someone has climbed up the steep road to the Alcazaba and, from any one of a number of battlement perches, spied the Plaza del Torros below, shaped like an oval from this high vantage above the city, with its sandy innards on display inside. Rarely is such a good bird's-eye view afforded of a Spanish bullring. It is surrounded by tall apartment and office complexes, which serve to enhance the optical effect; behind the buildings is the shipping port, one of Andalucía's three most important, and the Mediterranean Sea and coastline slipping away, anchored with cruisers and freighters.

■ History

Málaga has been a seafaring town since the ancient times of the Phoenicians, when the port was used to dump fish onto its banks for salting. The city's name is derived from its previous Phoenician name, *Malac*, or salt.

In the 19th century, the sweet Muscatel wine produced in the region came into favor throughout Europe. The Málagueños benefited tremendously from these exports; subsequently the area lapsed into an economic decline when a fungus ravaged its vineyards. Not long ago, Málaga had a dirty reputation, literally. It is a port city, which entails a certain degree of slummery, of no-goods looking to get away with free goods. But there is also an element to Málaga that is missing along the rest of the Costa del Sol. Here there is a life beyond tourism, there are cultural sites, a history that doesn't just date to the Swedish invasion 40 years ago. The growth and expansion that came with its airport, one of Spain's busiest, helped clear its record and clean its streets. The subtropical climate and dependably sunny days sparked a tourism boom in the 1960s along this coast – a boom that is still raging.

Now Andalucía's second largest city, Málaga continues to serve as the main hub for European tourists. More often than not they fly in, rent a car and promptly set off for one or another resort town on the Costa del Sol, leaving Málaga in the dust. Pablo Picasso, who was born in Málaga, departed the city rather quickly as well. But, before making tracks for Torremolinos on the coast (it shouldn't even be on your itinerary) or Ronda in the mountains to the north (a visit that is required!), at least climb to the top of the Alcazaba and take that picture. The beautiful view may make you want to stay longer.

■ Orientation

Stick to the area between the **Río Guadalmedina** that dumps into the sea just past the port to the west, and the hill of Gibralfaro that rises above the city to the east. Below it is the bullring, and the long Playa de La Malagueta, the nearest beach. The old city is situated around the port, with the leafy **Paseo del Parque** and **Paseo de Los Curas** separating the two, running from the Plaza del General Torrijos to the Plaza de La Marina. Calle Larios, the main pedestrian street in the old city, runs north from the Plaza de La Marina to the Plaza de La Constitución.

■ Useful Information

Oficina Municipal de Turismo: *Avda. De Cervantes 1, Paseo del Parque,* ☎ *95 260 44 10*; other locations are in the Plaza de la Merced and in the Correos (post office) on Avda. de Andalucía.

Málaga Airport: *Avda. del Comandante García Morato, s/n,* ☎ *95 204 88 04 or 95 204 88 44.*

Unitaxi: ☎ *95 232 00 00 or 95 233 33 33*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The train station *(☎ 90 224 02 02)* is next to the bus station (see walking directions below) on the Explanada de la Estación. Four fast trains run daily to **Madrid** (4½ hours), along with a handful of slower ones (12 or more hours); **Sevilla** (2½ hours) and **Córdoba** (three hours) each get five or more direct trains per day. **Granada** and **Ronda** have two or more, as do **Valencia** and **Barcelona**.

By Bus: The Estación Central de Autobuses (☎ 95 235 00 61) is west of the port and river on Paseo de Los Tilos. The easiest way to reach it from the old town is to cross the Puente de Tetuan (bridge), make an immediate left and then the first right onto Avda. de la Aurora. At the small rotary make a left on Callejones del Perchel and follow it a few blocks to the station. Five or more buses run daily to Madrid (six-seven hours). Other daily buses run to the coastal towns, **Ronda** (1½ hours), **Sevilla** (2½ hours), **Granada** (two hours) and **Córdoba** (three hours).

By Car: From **Madrid** by car, take the N-IV south, through Granada and all the way to the coast. From there, pick up the N-340 west. From **Sevilla**, take the A-92 east and at Antequera turn south on the N-331.

■ Sightseeing

Málaga would be visually unentertaining were it not for the **Alcazaba** riding the hill overlooking the city and port, with its terraced levels of battlements, towers and evergreens. King Badis, the *zirí* of Granada, was responsible for the construction of this for-

tified palace in the 11th century, though the site had served a defensive purpose long before. A partially excavated Roman amphitheater is visible at the base of the fortress, which has had a tunnel excavated beneath to facilitate transportation between the port and old city. The **Museo Arqueológico** inside houses a collection of Phoenician, Roman and Moorish artifacts, with an emphasis on the latter. *(C/ Alcazabilla, ☎ 95 222 00 43, open Oct.-April, Tues.-Sun 8:30 am-7pm; summer Tues.-Sun. 8:30 am-8 pm, closed Mon.; entry 1.80€, or 3€ with access to the castle of Gibralfaro.)*

Castillo de Gibralfaro: Yabal-Faruk was renamed Gibralfaro when the Moors reinforced the previous site under Yusuf I in the 14th century. The name Gibralfaro is derived from the Arabic *yabal* (mountain) and the Greek *faruk* (lighthouse). The clear indication is that, at an earlier time when the Phoenicians claimed the port, the mountain of Gibralfaro already contained a castle and it must have possessed a lighthouse. During the Moors' restructuring – no doubt hastened by the steadily encroaching Christians – the defensive wall known as the *coracha terrestre* was constructed, connecting the castle with the Alcazaba. It was one of the most imposing and impregnable Moorish fortress compounds in Spain.

After a 40-day siege in 1487 Málaga fell to the Christians, who quickly saw to it that all of the city's 15,000 inhabitants were rounded up and auctioned into slavery.

An interpretation center inside the castle offers a grouping of glass displays that highlight the various centuries of the castle's existence, along with models of what the city of Málaga would have looked like way back when.

To reach the castle, catch bus #35 from the Paseo del Parque. *(Open winter 9:30 am-5:45 pm, summer 9:30 am-7:45 pm; entry 1.80€, or 3€ with access to the Alcazaba.)*

La Catedral: Work on Málaga's cathedral began in 1528 under the architect Diego de Siloé, but, as is often the case in Spanish architectural history, construction carried on well into the succeeding centuries. In fact, the building still isn't complete. In the space where there should be a second bell tower there is only a small heap of pillars, construction having been halted in 1765 when funding dried up. The void has earned the cathedral its nickname, *La Manquita* (the one-armed one). The result is an odd but appealing mix of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque design. The **Museo Catedralicio** occupies annexed buildings adjoining the cathedral with a collection of religious art, including paintings by Cano, Coello and Morales. A trip up to the completed tower affords views of the old cityscape. *(C/ Molina Lario, ☎ 95 221 59 17, open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-6:45 pm.)*

Picasso in Málaga

Pablo Ruiz Picasso was born in Málaga in 1881, the son of Maria Picasso López and José Ruiz Blasco, a professor of drawing. The **Casa Natal de Picasso** *(Plaza de la Merced, ☎ 95 221 50 05, open Mon.-Sat. 11 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm)* was the site of his birth, a spritely yellow and white 19th-century apartment with a rounded-corner in the Plaza de la Merced. Today it serves as the headquarters of La Funcación Pablo Ruiz Picasso, which hosts

seminars and a free exhibition with local sketches and paintings on display. Málaga's fine arts museum, the **Museo de Bellas Artes** *(C/ Alcazabilla 2, open Tues. 3-8 pm, Wed.-Fri. 9 am-8 pm, Sat-Sun. 9 am-2 pm)* also devotes a space to some of the artist's early sketches and paintings. Soon, the local tourism board says, the Museo Picasso will be a reality. The artist spent only the first 10 years of his life in Málaga before his father moved the family to La Coruña in Galicia, where his talent began to manifest itself. From there, his career blossomed in Barcelona, Madrid and France and soon the world knew him as one of the founders of Cubism, as the man who superstitiously believed that the key to a long life was to keep painting. He worked steadily into his 80s, but rarely returned to Málaga.

■ Where to Stay

El Parador de Gibralfaro *(☎ 95 222 19 02, fax 95 222 19 04, www.parador.es, d 119€)* is a choice place to stay in Málaga. Located on the top of mount Gibralfaro, up a winding road with fancy mansions surrounded by pines and eucalyptus, the hotel has a great view of the city and the bay. The 38 rooms are elegantly furnished in mauve tones and burgundies, with balconies and spacious sitting areas done up with nicely upholstered reading chairs. There is a swimming pool on the top floor and a terrace restaurant with equally appealing views. The castle next door and the setting keep the place booked, so make reservations.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Hostal El Cenachero *(C/ Barroso 5, ☎ 95 222 40 88, d 38€)* is conveniently located three blocks off the port in the old neighborhood between the Avda. Manuel Agustin Herdia and the thoroughfare Alameda Principal. All of the rooms are exterior, with balconies or, at the least, windows opening onto the street. Bathrooms in each of the rooms have been redone and the television has four to five Spanish-language channels and two more with fuzzy reception.

Hostal Pedregalejo *(C/ Conde de las Navas 9, Pedregalejo, ☎ 95 229 32 18, d 45€)* is in the *barrio* of the same name a few minutes east of the city center. The hostel is relatively new and has been furnished to look as it might have100 years ago. All of the rooms have full bath, television and air conditioning.

To go dirt cheap, consider the **Alberque Juvenil Málaga** (Plaza de Pío XII, s/n, ☎ *95 230 85 00)*, in a quiet area 10 minutes walk west from the city center along the Avenida de Andalucía. The place is popular with the young crowd, so make reservations if possible. If not, show up and, if you don't have a youth hostelling card and they do have room, they'll be friendly enough to issue one on the spot and accept your money.

Pensión Derby *(C/ San Juan de Díos 1, ☎ 95 222 13 01, d 33€)* is a run-down place on the upswing (restorations ongoing). What do you say when there is nothing else to recommend a hostel? That it is clean. Have a look at more than one room if possible, since the building is old and misaligned. Rooms with bathrooms cost 40€ for a double.

■ What to Eat & Where

Reserve **Restaurante Adolfo** *($$$$, Paseo Marítimo Pablo Ruíz Picasso 12, ☎ 95 260 19 14)* for a special night out. This restaurant is located on the beach, looks out on the water and is known for its seafood. Adolfo Canseco, the chef, was trained in Spain and France and his cuisine is a mild fusion of the two styles, with an emphasis on local gastronomy. Choose from an ample selection of wines and perhaps opt for the sweet Muscatel wines for which Málaga is known. Some of the more common brand names include Guinda, Málaga Virgen, Moscatel Dorado, Pajarete or Quitapenas. Expect the meal to cost upwards of 35€ per person.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Santa Paula *($$$$, Avda de los Guindos, s/n, ☎ 95 223 94 45)* is another local institution that is dependably crowded even though the restaurant is huge. Try the soups, either the *borrachuelos* (a broth made with angelfish) or the local favorite, *sopa de ajo blanco* (sometimes called *sopa viña AB*), a thick, tart soup of blended garlic and almonds served chilled with halved Muscatel grapes on top. The specialties include grilled *bacalao* (cod) and *arroz con perdiz* (a rice dish with partridge).

In the summer, the ***chringuitos*** open up along the beach. These open-air restaurants are recommended for their fried and salted seafood and sea breezes. Among them are **Los Cuñaos** *($$, Paseo Maritimo el Pedregal, s/n, ☎ 95 229 34 03)* and **Mari Cuchi** *($$, Paseo Marítimo el Pedregal 14, ☎ 95 229 04 12)*.

Mesón Rincón Catedral *($$, C/ Cañon 7)* lies in the shadows of the cathedral and specializes in Malagueño cuisine. Fried calamari is a popular *racíon* in these parts; in fact, fried anything is popular – *bocquerones* (anchovies), *sardines* (sardines), *pechuga de pollo villaroy* (fried chicken breast with potatoes and vegetables). The *sopa de ajo blanco*, a gazpacho variety which is flavored with the grapes used in Muscatel wine, is served here in the summer. Their *menu del día* costs 10€.

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla *($-$$, C/ Pozo del Rey 5, ☎ 95 221 48 58)* caters to vegetarians with fruit smoothies, seafood salads and Swiss fondue. There are also more creative entrées to choose from as well as environmentally sensitive wines and home-brewed, natural *cervezas*. The restaurant is at the foot of the Alcazaba.

■ Nightlife

The young and the young at heart spend their evenings drinking and socializing in and around the large **Plaza de La Merced** a few blocks north of the Alcazaba. South and west from here the streets are winding and old, full of restaurants, *cervecerías* and packed *tapas* bars. The festivities carry as far west as the **Plaza**

de la Constitution and as late as forever in the streets of the **Plaza de Uncibay** a few blocks north, where many of the most frequented discos are located. The alternative is the beach scene along the **Playa de la Malagueta**, which winds down a little earlier and doesn't do much in the winter. To reach this area, head east of the town along the Paseo Maritimo to the Barrio of Pedregalejo; when the makeshift bars close down, head inland for more action. The weekly guide ***Informacíones de Málaga*** has the scoop on the current entertainment scene and can be picked up at kiosks and tourism offices.

■ Excursions from Málaga

Antequera

An hour north of Málaga, Antequera is renowned for its **Dolmens de Antequera**, ancient rock funeral pyres scattered throughout the historical town. The oldest among them, the Menga dolmen, was built around 2500 BC. The nearby Viera and El Romeral dolmens are believed to have been built between 2000 and 1800 BC. The latter is considered the most spectacular, with a false dome comprised of stones carried from the nearby Veracruz quarry and circular chambers connected by a long gallery.

While you're in Antequera, visit the **Torcal de Antequera**, and follow the sign-posted trails through a mind-boggling natural creation of strangely eroded calcareous rock. Great gray slabs that look like gigantic skipping stones are stacked like pancakes, while others are shaped like building blocks and crude boulders.

Climbing the Garganta del Chorro

"Smashing Pumpkins," "Swimming Through a Shark Attack," "Dom Perineum" – a few of many routes bolted into the varied rock faces of the Parque Natural de Los Gaitanes. Climbers know the area well as the Garganta del Chorro, an immense chasm of limestone cut by the Guadalhorce River to depths reaching 180 m (590 feet). With single and multi-pitch routes ranging in grade from F4-F8a, it is the most favorable area in Andalucía for climbing and one of Spain's most versatile. Along the river an old railway has rendered the rock walls passable via a series of tunnels. Clinging precariously to the canyon face above is the **Camino del Rey** (King's Path), a catwalk first installed to allow the king to oversee construction of a hydraulic damn that has since filled the area with a series of lakes. The catwalk is now officially off-limits. The entire first section has been removed and other sections have fallen 100-200 feet to the bottom of the gorge. Not a recommended hike, but still one that is attempted by the daring or the near-insane. Climbers are a little of both. If you do attempt this "hike," consider bringing along a harness and a couple of slings.

The climbing routes of the gorge are generally well bolted (though in places traditional protection is a must) and are divided into three areas: lower, central and upper. The upper routes have lately been de-bolted and restricted. The lower routes are most frequented and, as a result, show some polished rock in places. The middle area is known for Los Cotos, what some say is Europe's single largest climbing slab, and Makinodromo, the big-boy best left to the experts with grades up to F8.

Within an hour's walk of the main climbing zone there are a number of other popular areas. Among them, the route of the Escalera Arabe (Arabic Stair) mounts one of the highest crags and affords views of the Mediterranean Sea.

Practicalities

The small village of El Chorro serves as a base for climbers. One daily **train** connects Málaga and Ronda to the village. By **car**, take the A-357 west from Málaga.

Once in El Chorro the climbing routes can be reached on foot. Otherwise you can rent bikes at the campground **El Chorro** *(Paraje Natural de El Chorro, ☎ 95 211 26 96, www.campingelchorro.com).* This small site is in a beautiful setting with gray crags rising above it. It has a capacity for 151 people and only basic facilities such as showers, plus gas and electric hook-ups. A one-night stay costs an adult 3.30€ and a tent 1.95€. It is one of a handful of budget accommodations in the area, and a 20-minute walk from the village.

Finca La Campana offers bunk-bed accommodations (10€) and private, four-person apartments (25-45€). **La Garganta** is a climbing *refugio* just down from the train station. A bunk bed will run 7€ per night. The nearby climbing shop **Aventura El Chorro** can help out with information on the climbs, equipment and mountain bike rentals. In the village, there are a few *alimentacíones*, small markets where you can pick up the bare essentials, such as milk, water, cheese, jamón Serrano and ice cream.

Ronda

A *serranía* is a mountainous area. Ronda is a city in the middle of one, spreading to the very edge of a limestone crag that falls 100 meters (328 feet) to the valley floor, the town divided into its old and new neighborhoods by the spectacular Tajo Gorge cut through the crag by the River Guadalevín. Ronda's impressive setting has inspired a great deal of romantic sentimentality. The Austro-German poet Rainier Maria Rilke called it, "the town of your dreams." Hemingway said it was the perfect place "if you ever go to Spain on a honeymoon or if you ever bolt with anyone."

Ronda was first established by the Celts. It is the cradle of modern-day bullfighting and was the refuge of thieving *bandoleros* for centuries. Its Plaza de Toros is one of the oldest and most respected in Spain, due to its important role in the development of modern bullfighting. Its Bandit Museum (see below) is nothing of the sort. There were the Romeros of Ronda who reinterpreted the sport of bullfighting in the 19th century with lasting effects and the Ordóñez brothers who renewed Ronda's reputation for the sport in the 20th century. The bandits merely stole a lot and somehow managed to acquire folkloric status. Another fact: Spaniards owe their national police force, the Guardia Civil, to the bandits. Take time to walk along the rim of the gorge; wonder through the narrow, cobwebbed streets of the old Arabic city; merge with the hungry shopping crowd on the pedestrian street of Espinel and allow it to spit you out at the foot of the Plaza de Toros. Then maybe go see the Bandit Museum.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The train station *(Avda. de Andalucía, ☎ 95 287 16 73)* is in the northeastern corner of the newer city. To reach it from tourist center, follow the Carretera Espinel away from the bullring and make a left on C/ Setenil when it angles across. At Avda. Martínez Astein make a left.

Two trains per day run to Madrid (4½ hours) and Córdoba (three hours) and four to Málaga (1¾ hours). To reach Granada (three hours) or Sevilla (2½ hours), you'll have to make a change in Bobadilla.

By Bus: The bus station is in the Plaza Concepción García Redondo, just down the Avenida de Andalucía from the train station. Up to five buses leave per day for Málaga (two hours), Cádiz (four hours) and Sevilla (2½ hours).

By Car: From Málaga, head west along the N-340/E-15 and, after passing through Marbella, exit north on the A-376. From Sevilla, take the A-473 southeast in the direction of Utrera, pass through this city and pick up the A-382 to the west. In a few kilometers exit south on the A-376. From Granada, take the A-92 west and at Antequera continue heading west on the A-382. You can turn south on a scenic country road at Almargen or continue on to the A-376 and take it south.

■ Orientation

"We caught sight of Ronda. It sat atop a mountain crag like a natural extension of the landscape and by the light of the sun it seemed to me the loveliest city in the world." Juan Goytisolo

The gorge of the Tajo, which literally means "steep cliff," effectively divides the city into the old whitewashed Arabic quarter and the new part of town known as **El Mercadillo**. The spine of El Mercadillo is Carrera Espinel, a busy pedestrian lane sided by restaurants and shops that intersects with the Calle Virgen de la Paz at the Plaza Teniente Arce. Calle Virgen runs to the Puente Nuevo connecting the two city halves.

■ Sightseeing

Plaza de Toros

Ronda's dazzling white Plaza de Toros is impossible to miss just off Plaza Teniente Arce and precariously near the edge of the cliff. In the world of Spanish bullfighting, there is Ronda and then, as they say, there are all of the other cities. Its Plaza de Toros is one of the oldest in Spain, completed in 1785 during a period when the sport was experiencing rapid changes due in large part to a family from Ronda. The inaugural bullfight featured Pedro Romero (1754-1839) of Ronda, the spearhead of a new style of fighting and the leading icon of bullfighting still today. Pedro's grandfather Francisco was the first to use a red cape to manipulate the bulls. Pedro's father Juan incorporated the *cuadrilla*, a group of horseback riders that would assist the matador. During his own career, Pedro Romero would bring the sport and the city everlasting fame by sending almost 6,000 bulls to the slaughterhouse before he retired, unharmed. His style of maintaining a death-defying proximity to the bulls helped to establish what is known as the Ronda School of bullfighting.

Ronda's roots in the sport date to 1572 when King Felipe II established the Real Maestranza de Caballería de Ronda to train soldiers in horsemanship. Because of their ferocity when provoked, bulls were often used in training. It didn't take long before the contest had evolved and begun to draw crowds. Among those spectators who would later be seduced by the sport were Orson Welles, who himself had trained at an early age to be a bullfighter, and Er-

nest Hemingway. You'll see their likenesses in the bullfighting museum and on the nearby ceramic street signs that have been named for them. They are the favored foreign sons of Ronda, great fans of the Ordóñez family of bullfighters that would carry Ronda's reputation through the 20th century. The statues of Cayetano Ordóñez and his son Antonio can be admired outside the plaza. Hemingway's contribution to the sport were his books, *The Sun Also Rises* and *Death in the Afternoon*. If there is one place to see a bullfight in Spain, he wrote, it is at the Plaza de Toros in Ronda.

The Plaza de Toros *(C/ Virgen de la Paz 15, ☎ 95 287 15 39)* is open Nov.-Feb. 10 am-6 pm, Mar.-April 10 am-7 pm and May-Oct. 10 am-8 pm. Entry to the ring and the Museo Taurino is 4.50€. The country's most popular bullfights are held at the beginning of September during the *corridas goyescas*, in which the 19th-century costumes immortalized by Goya in his painting of the Romeros, *Tauromachy* (a print of this work is on display in the bullfighting museum). These fights were inaugurated by the Ordóñez family to correspond with the Fería de Pedro Romero.

After visiting the Plaza de Toros, walk through the **Alameda del Tajo**, the city park next door, and to the edge of the gorge. The view of the valley spreading out before this *mirador* to the west is expansive; the river far below cuts a green ribbon at the foot of the cliff. Follow the *paseo* around this edge in the direction of the Plaza de Toros. The **Paseo de Blas Infante** is another garden area with terrific viewpoints. Hike up and around the *Parador* and, wrapping around it, look on to the old city across the most impressive aspect of the gorge. The *Parador* was once the town hall, the setting of a gruesome civil war scene depicted in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Though his book was a work of fiction, the event was anything but. A group of the city's accused fascists were rounded up and herded into the town hall as two lines of townspeople assembled outside. One-by-one the condemned were forced to walk the gauntlet; along the way they were clubbed, stoned and beaten. At the end of this human tunnel lay the cliff, where, one after another, each fascist was either tossed or leaped to his death.

Just ahead is the 18th-century **Puente Nuevo**, the symbol of the town rising over 300 feet from the Guadalevín River below. Housed inside it is the Centro Interpretación del Puente Nuevo, which details the bridge's construction process *(open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-6 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 2€).*

Into the Old Town, the Moorish Labyrinth...

After crossing the bridge from El Mercadillo, you'll pass the **Convento de Santo Domingo** on the left, what once served as a headquarters for the Inquisition. At this point there are two options.

OPTION 1: Continue straight ahead on Calle Armiñán. This is the main street running through the center of the old *barrio*, worth a tour to admire the intricately carved wooden doors along the way, three of Ronda's museums and a number of local crafts shops.

The **Museo Lara** *(C/ Armiñan 29, ☎ 95 287 12 63)* is one block up on the left in the 18th-century Casa Palacio de los Condes de la Conquista. This science and history museum has halls devoted to just about everything. There is the

hall of clocks, the hall of archeology, an exhibition on the last 100 years of cinema, a replica of a typical Andalucían wine cellar, a collection of sewing machines and another of opera glasses.

The **Museo de Caza** *(C/ Armiñan 59, ☎ 95 287 78 62),* on the other hand, is strictly devoted to the art of hunting. The place is rather coyly referred to as a museum (which all but guarantees it will be on local tourist route lists), though it is just as much a taxidermy and gun shop. Much of its mounted trophies and hunting equipment on display are also for sale. It's one block up from the Museo Lara on the left; two blocks beyond is the **Museo de Bandolero** *(C/ Armiñán 65, ☎ 95 287 77 85)*. The Bandit Museum characterizes, or perhaps capitalizes on, Ronda's old time reputation as a haven for bandits, those glorified carjackers of yore. Through the early 20th century they clamored to the Serranía (the mountainous area) de Ronda and the nearby Sierras of Grazalema to hide out in the natural caves; there they hoarded their bounties acquired in raids on the trading routes through Andalucía. The bulk of the exhibition is devoted to written testimonials and documentation on the bandits and the myth spawned by the most famous among them. One hall is devoted to the Getarees, the police force formed to combat these trailway robbers that would later evolve into Spain's modern day Guardia Civil.

OPTION 2: After crossing the bridge, make a left on Calle Santo Domingo. This route will make a loop through the old city, passing its most significant monuments. A block ahead on the left is the **Casa del Rey Moro** (Moorish King's Home), a decidedly unadorned 18th-century home built on the remains of a Moorish palace. The **Jardines de Forestier** around it do much to embellish the setting. These gardens were designed in 1912 by the French landscaper Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier, who also took credit for Sevilla's Parque de María Louisa and Barcelona's Montjüic. The gardens preserve ample views of the Tajo gorge parting the mountain a few feet away.

From here you can descend the 365 steps to **La Mina de Agua** at the foot of the gorge. This winding, once secret passage was carved in the stone by the Moors in the 14th century as a way of bringing water up from the river to the city. Using skin jugs known as *zagues*, Spanish slaves were put to the task. An elaborate system was devised to defend this precious water supply in the event of attack by the Christians. A tower was constructed to monitor the river and mine and to serve as a hidden escape route. The Terraza de la Conquista below it served as a monitoring point and as a first line of defense; the Sala de Armas was supplied with weapons and cauldrons ready to dump boiling oil and water over the edge of the gorge. The Moors of Ronda ultimately capitulated to the Christians in 1485 because the latter managed to... you guessed it, block the city's water source.

Continuing to the end of the street, the **Puente Viejo**, the old bridge built by the Arabs, can be reached, along with the remains of the 13th-century **Baños Árabes**. At this point, a right leads down Calle Marqués de Salvatierra where, at the end of the street, you'll notice the **Alminar de San Sebastián**. This 14th-century Mudéjar minaret is all that remains of an Arabic mosque that once occupied the site.

At the intersection with Calle Armiñan make a left and then the first right into the **Plaza Duquesa de Parcent**. Have a seat in the small garden in the center of the plaza and listen for the bells to chime in the tower of the **Iglesia**

de Sta María La Mayor. This structure was also a mosque before King Fernando el Católico converted it into a church in the 15th century. The minaret, along with the inner mirhab, or prayer niche, are all that survive from the 13th-century mosque. If you venture around behind the church you will encounter the Palacio de Moctezuma with its **Museo Peinado**. The vanguard painter behind the museum, Joaquín Peinado, was born in Ronda in 1898. His occasionally abstract and geometrical depictions of still lives and the naked form are on display in this renovated palace. Across the plaza is the ***Ayuntamiento***, or town hall, a 20th-century peach-colored restoration with a long, flat façade composed of two levels of windowed arches.

Facing away from the *Ayuntamiento*, follow the second street to the left of the church through the Plaza Mondragón and the **Palacio Mondragón** *(open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-6 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 2€).* This palace dates to 1491 and is one of Ronda's most impressive in ornamentation. Inside, the original Moorish elements are maintained from the days when the palace belonged to the Moorish king Abb el Malik, son of the Sultan of Morocco. There are three Mudéjar courtyards surrounded by brick arches and adorned with mosaic tiles, numerous Moorish-inspired keyhole entryways, gardens and ceilings of intricate wood marquetry. After having defeated the Moors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella returned to Ronda and stayed in this palace. The outer façade with its two brick towers was rebuilt in the 18th century. It is now occupied by a museum devoted to Ronda and the surrounding areas of the *serranía*.

Just past the palace are steps that lead to a hiking trail down to the river at the base of the gorge. Look for the sign "El Morabito, Muebles, Decaracíon, Café" and, from there, follow the occasionally stepped but mostly dirt path down. It takes 15 minutes to reach the bottom, and don't wear dancing shoes. Halfway along you can stop at the remains of a Moorish defensive wall and train your camera up toward the city of Ronda on the cliff, with the gorge and Puente Nuevo creating a nice backdrop to the right. Back up top, at the Plaza María Auxiliadora with its *mirador* overlooking the valley, follow the Calle Tenorio a few blocks and return to the Puente Nuevo.

■ Where to Stay

The **Parador de Ronda** *(Plaza de España, s/n, ☎ 95 287 75 00, fax 95 287 81 88, ronda@parador.es, d 116€)* is one of the more incredible places – hands down – to call it a night in Spain. The hotel is perched on the edge of the Tajo gorge between the Plaza de Toros and the Puente Nuevo in what was Ronda's town hall, an expansive stone construction with three floors of arcaded balconies looking

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

out over the valley and gorge. Stained walnut floors and contemporary accents characterize the rooms, which spare no essentials. The swimming pool looks as if it might drain right over the side of the cliff and from it are splashy views of the old whitewashed Arabic town across the gap. The **Restaurante del Parador**, $$$-$$$$, prepares a cuisine that reflects the wide variety of Andalucían tastes, including *salmorejo* (the thick gazpacho of Córdoba), *ajo blanco* (the Málagan variety flavored with Moscatel), *perdiz estofada* (stewed partridge) and various *asados* (or roasts, which are most acclaimed in the region of Castilla y León).

The **Hotel-Restaurante Don Míguel** *(Plaza de España 4, ☎ 95 287 77 22, fax 95 287 10 90, restaurant 95 287 10 90, d 66€)* shares the edge of the gorge with the *parador* on the other side of the Puente Nuevo. A series of terraced balconies cling to the side of the hotel, to the cliff, and make for great viewpoints down the swath of the gorge where the Puente Viejo and Puente Árabe can be seen. Once upon a time the jailer of the Puente Nuevo prison lived in this lodge. The rooms are well appointed, though some are larger than others and the best have tall grilled windows that open up to the Tajo Gorge.

The **Hotel Acinipo** *(C/ José Aparico 7, ☎ 95 216 10 02, www.hotelacinipo.com, d 93€)*, a white cube of contemporary, minimalist design, makes a bold statement next to the Plaza de Toros and the other traditional architecture in this area of one of Spain's oldest cities. The 14 rooms are highly stylized, each with a unique modern flare, intelligent lighting schemes and abstract paintings adorning the walls. Bathrooms are slick and tiled with stainless steel basins. A Jacuzzi and lounge area is incorporated into some of the rooms and views over the gorge range from good to the best.

The **Café Atrivm**, $$$, a cocktail lounge and restaurant in the hotel, is posh and sophisticated. Dinner choices include *rabo de toro* (oxtail stew), *migas rondeñas* (Ronda's take on the fried breadcrumb dish) and *trucha a la plancha* (grilled trout).

Hotel-Restaurante Hnos. Macías *(C/ Pedro Romero 3, ☎ 95 287 42 38, d 36-42€)* is across the street from the Plaza de Toros on the homely pedestrian street of Pedro Romero. The interior décor is an antique blend of Mudéjar tiling and arches and wooden cottage furniture. Rooms are simple but attractive with rough stucco walls and heavy wooden accents. All have full bath, television and air conditioning.

Pension Aguilar *(C/ Naranja 28, ☎ 95 287 19 94, d 35€)* is a block off the pedestrian zone of Carrera Espinel. Rooms are clean and new, with full modern bathrooms and television. The exterior rooms have balconies that open onto the street below. An elevator makes access to the second and third floors easy going.

Camping

El Sur *(Carretera Algeciras, km 1.5, ☎ 95 287 59 39)* is just south of Ronda on the A-369 and open all year. To reach it, cross the Puente Nuevo bridge into the old Arabic quarters and watch for the exit right to Algeciras. One person costs 2.66€ per night; a tent or a car add 2.24€. The campsite has all the facilities. The only thing you'll want to bring is a swimming pool.

■ Where to Eat

Restaurante Pedro Romero *($$$, C/ Virgen de la Paz 18, ☎ 95 287 13 67)*, across the street from the Plaza de Toros, draws a mixed crowd of locals and tourists. The restaurant is named for the famous Rondeño bullfighter and respected for its selection of *embutidos* (sausages), its specialty foîe gras in a Malagueño Muscatel wine sauce and its house desert, a cheese tart doused in honey and lemon.

Sol y Sombra *($$, C/ Virgen de la Paz 26, ☎ 95 218 71 76)* is lacking the traditional charm of Pedro Romero's, but the décor, if a little starched, is cheaply elegant and the *menu del día* is cheap and tasty at 11€. I had a Mediterranean tossed salad for starters, a thin filet of beef (*filete de ternera*) and flan for desert. Standard. The claim is made that Pedro Romero and his brother Francisco once lived in this building.

Casa Santa Pola *($$, C/ Santa Domingo 3, ☎ 95 287 92 08)* is an *asador*, or roasting house, on the edge of the gorge. The ambiance is a mix of Arabic (it rests atop the foundations of a former mosque) and classical (it was the home of the count and countess of Santa Pola during the reign of the Catholic monarchs). In this cool setting, the reasonable prices may seem too cheap. Specialties include roast meats and a fried eggplant bathed in cane honey. The windows and outdoor terraces have that wonderful Ronda view.

Costa del Sol

The concrete coast, bathed in sun over 300 days out of the year and spoiled rotten to the core. Do you long for English breakfasts and all-inclusive resorts? Does the thought of bingo and birdies send your heart reeling? Can one defame the Costa del Sol without realizing that somewhere along the line you probably had a pretty good time on it? Nothing is missing and that is the problem with the Costa del Sol, all 150 over-developed kilometers (90 miles) of it down the southern Mediterranean coast, from the flats of Sotogrande in the west to the mountainous coastlines of Nerja in the east. To put this "Coast of the Sun" into perspective, consider its competition: the northern Spanish coast of the Atlantic is green and wild but it rains too much; the southern Atlantic Costa de la Luz is, well, it's better but lacks the reputation; the eastern Mediterranean coast is too long to define and the temperature isn't consistently conducive to sunbathing. What you're left with is part-enchantment, part-concrete and a helluva lot of foreigners frying on one of 50 beaches that enjoy an average temperature of 18°C (64°F). You've got fancy yachts and filthy little fishing boats, sardines roasting on a beach spitfire and a caldron of paella outside Nerja large enough to cook five bad little boys. There are people breathing under water and others sucking wind on mountain trails above Marbella. Not every beautiful view has been obscured by gaudy high-rise apartments. Some ancient Phoenician, Greek, Cathaginian and Roman sites aren't buried. What this section proposes is three towns that exemplify the Costa del Sol: Marbella because it is so over the top, Torremolinos because every Spanish guidebook needs one token Costa del Sol resort (and because the tourism boom of the 1960s centered around this town) and Nerja, the only Costa del Sol resort town that retains a sense of magic and, if I may be so bold, quaintness.

■ Marbella

Marbella today is the result of a very, very rich people that first began to frequent this town west of Málaga in the 1960s. The jet set could not have chosen a prettier setting on the Costa del Sol: a once sleepy, white-washed port village at the foot of the leafy Sierra Blanca mountains used by Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Arab merchants before the Christians – now a template for beachside decadence and high-class frivolity, a place to be seen and spend, spend, spend. In the surrounding area are more golf courses and amusement parks than anywhere else in Spain and in the harbors are yachts so plush that P-Diddy might consider upgrading. The bright white Marbella arch over the western entrance to the town is nothing if not symbolic of the fantasy land on the other side, an elite netherworld that is colorful and unique – one of the few places in Spain that retains no modesty whatsoever.

Useful Information

The **tourist information** office is on Calle Glorieta de la Fontanilla-Paseo Marítim, ☎ 95 277 14 42. If you're interested in playing golf or tennis in Marbella, their helpful staff can point out the courses and courts open to the public.

Getting Here & Around

To reach Marbella from other areas in Spain, you'll have to ride the bus into town or rent your own car. The main **estacíon de autobus** is north of the old city center on Avda Trapiche *(☎ 95 276 44 00)*. Buses run all day long to **Málaga** (1½ hours), **Cádiz** (four hours), **Granada** (four hours) and **Ronda** (one-two hours) with up to eight per day; **Madrid** (eight hours) has 10 or more buses per day. Municipal buses and ones traveling to areas just outside Marbella depart from either Puerto Banús or the Avda Ricardo Soriano, depending on the destination. Routes are posted at each local stop, though you can also get such information from the tourist offices or the ticket office at the main bus station.

Sightseeing

Marbella's Casco Antiguo

The colorful **Plaza de Los Naranjos** is vintage Marbella, shaded by fragrant orange trees and surrounded by the 16th-century town hall and the 17th-century house of the magistrate, both white-washed and tiled like the rest of the old Moorish town. You can dine in the open air of the plaza, shop the numerous boutiques in the area or roam the pretty white streets, San Cristobal and Virgen de Los Dolores, that flow with bougainvilleas and ferns. The town's unassuming main church, the 16th-century Iglesia Mayor de La Encarnación, is a block off the plaza. Behind it is a tower and remains of a ninth-century Moorish fortress.

The **Museo del Grabado Español Contemporáneo** *(C/ Hospital Bazán, s/n, ☎ 95 282 50 35, open Mon. 10 am-2 pm, Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 6-9 pm)* occupies the 16th-century Palacio Bazán, once a charity hospital. It houses a collection of engravings by Dalí, Miró, Tápies and Picasso, as well as other contemporary graphic art.

To the south of the plaza is the **Parque de la Alamada**, Marbella's oldest urban park. It is bright and colorful when in bloom and full of panacea and

ficus trees. The evening *paseo* or stroll is popular here. A few blocks northeast of the plaza the **Museo del Bonsai** *(☎ 95 296 29 26)* is in another of Marbella's parks, the **Parque Arroyo de la Represa**. This recently inaugurated private museum is devoted to the bonsai tree.

Beaches & Ports

Marbella owes its reputation to the ritzy **Puerta Banús** *(CN-340, km 175, ☎ 95 290 98 00)*, west of the city center. This is the enclave of the rich and famous; they moor their yachts and decked-out sailboats in the 1,000-berth marina and, after a day of sunning on the beaches, mingle in linen pants and sport coats in the waterfront bars, or *chiringuitos*. Five-star restaurants, lavish little shops and a casino make for other entertainment. West and east of the marina, the sandy areas become decidedly less pompous. Puerta Banús can be reached by the municipal bus, which has a stop on the Avda Ricardo Soriano.

In all, the Marbella coastline covers 26 km (16 miles) from Guadalmina to Cabopino in the east. The latter features the **Puerto de Cabopino** *(CN-340, km 196, ☎ 95 283 19 75)*, another crowded yacht harbor that is somewhat relieved by the harbor nearest town, the **Puerto de Deportivo Marbella** *(Seaside Promenade, Marbella, ☎ 95 282 58 69)*.

Adventures on Water

Waterskiing without a boat? It's possible and only a little insane. **Cable skiing** has been the rage in watersports since the late '90s when an elaborate system of overhead pulleys and tracks first towed skiers across placid water – without an engine. Wakeboarders embrace the sport because it doesn't require a $40,000 towboat and allows jumps of 20 or more feet without the help of a wake. These parks are found all over Florida, the self-professed watersports capital of the world, but in Spain only in Marbella. **Cable Ski Marbella** is 10 km (6.2 miles) west of Marbella in San Pedro de Alcantara *(Guadalmina Alta, Parque de las Medranas, ☎ 95 278 55 79, fax 95 278 82 37, cable-ski@jet.es)*.

The best place to find **scuba diving** outfits is in the Puerta de Deportivo on the water across the Paseo Maritimo from the old city. Two of the many dive shops are **Buceo Marbella** *(Puerto Deportivo 10, ☎ 95 277 53 42, cbmdivin@teleline.es, www.buceomarbella.com)* and **Diving Marbella** *(Puerto Deportivo 4, ☎ 95 902 304, www.divingmarbella.com)*.

For **canyoning**, **quad trips** or **4x4 safaris** in the natural environs of Marbella, contact **The Safari Shop** *(☎ 95 290 50 82, fax 95 281 46 56, www.spain4fun.com)*, in the Cristamar shopping center at the Puerto Banús.

Marbella is not short on **chartered yachts and sailboats**. **Marbella Charter** *(Marina Marbella edificio Levante 10, Puerto Banús, ☎ 66 040 96 00, charter@marinamarbella.net)* offers full-day and half-day cruises that include fishing, snorkeling and tubing aboard one of two 37-foot motor yachts. Call ahead for reservations with **Yacht Charters** *(C/ Zurbano 71, Madrid, ☎ 91 441 71 24)*, based out of Madrid. This company rents sailing and motorboats with a skipper for half-day, full-day and week-long water excursions. Deep-sea fishing, waterskiing and sailing courses are part of the package. For more information, contact the yacht clubs of the **Puerto Deportivo of**

Marbella *(☎ 95 277 57 00)* or the **Puerto Deportivo of Puerto Banús** *(☎ 95 290 98 00)*.

Where to Stay

El Fuerte *(Plaza El Fuerte, s/n, ☎ 95 286 15 00, fax 95 282 44 11, d 115-150€)* looks onto the beach from what was originally a flour factory. Rooms are not all that spacious or even extravagantly decorated, as one might expect for the price, but the private balconies with Mediterranean Sea views are a plus.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

To do the all-inclusive thing, **Don Miguel Golf and Sport Hotel** *(Avda del Trapiche, s/n, ☎ 95 105 90 00, fax 95 105 90 03, s: 130-150€)* is one of the oldest of its kind around town. Rooms are fully loaded and have balconies overlooking either the beach or the Sierra Blanca Mountains. The grounds are equipped with tennis courts, access to an 18-hole golf course, a gymnasium and more than one swimming pool.

In the old city center is **Hostal El Castillo** *(Plaza de San Bernabé 2, ☎ 95 277 17 39)*, a pretty little place with balconies full of hanging roses and jasmine. Rooms are simple but bright and cost 20-30€ per double.

Pensión La Estrella *(C/ San Cristóbal 36, ☎ 95 277 94 72)* is nothing to write home about but it is a short walk from the beach and located on a pretty, flowered street. Rooms are plain and clean and under 50€ for a double.

The cheapest sleeping option in Marbella is the **Albergue Juvenil África** *(C/ Trapiche 2, ☎ 95 277 14 91)*, in the north of the Casco Antiguo heading toward the bus station. You'll need an *albergue juvenile* card to get the 10€ bunk bed rate and to get in the swimming pool.

Caravaning Marbella Playa *(CN 340, km 192, ☎ 95 283 39 98)* is a few kilometers east of Marbella on the water. This huge campground is well-equipped with sports facilities, clean showers and restrooms and a decent mini-market selling food, supplies and basic camping equipment. There is a swimming pool, and the ocean is just a short walk away. A *parcelo* costs 19.26€ for two people, a car and caravan or tent. Singles cost 4.12€, tents are 6.94€, cars 4.12€ and caravans 6.94€.

What & Where To Eat

Restaurante Cipriano *($$$$, Avda. de las Playas del Duque, edifice Sevilla, ☎ 95 281 59 97)* is a mogul magnet and its prices reflect its clientele. Seafood is what's cooking and the terrace is packed in the summer with the rich and the wannabes. Paella is accomplished, as are a variety of salted or fried fish.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

To eat on the beach, make for the numerous open-air *chiringuitos* of the Playa de Levante in the Puerto Banús, Playa Bajadilla and Playa Venus. Most menus are heavy on fried seafood, the trademark of Costa del Sol cuisine. You'll notice the prevalent orange glow of outdoor grills and smell the skewered sardines roasting on them. Heady competition ensures that prices and product are roughly the same from one *chiringuito* to the next.

Off the water, **La Tirana** *($$, C/ Huerta Márquez, ☎ 95 286 34 24)* is a friendly place devoted to Andalucían fare. Specialties include sardine balls in tomato sauce, avocado gazpacho soup and a wild duck sirloin marinated in soy and honey.

Tapas Santiago *($, Avda del Mar 20, ☎ 95 277 00 78)* is located along the Paseo Maritimo. As the name suggests, this is the place to go for *tapas* in Marbella, with choices ranging from stuffed quail to kidney beans with cuttlefish and vegetable stews.

■ Torremolinos

A cheap tourist brochure calls Torremolinos "the most appaling resort on the Costa del Sol." The author likely meant to include an e; more appropriate would have been to add another l to properly characterize the town. Appealling.

Back in the '60s Torremolinos was the place to be on the Costa del Sol. Things were happening. The Swedish invasion was well under way and Spaniards were learning to adjust to the scantily clad blond bombshells from the north. A young, hip crowd that openly indulged in marijuana staged late-night beach parties around 10-foot-high bonfires on a nightly basis. It was just beginning to attract the attention of developers; 30 years later, once they had stopped smoking dope and had come to prefer afternoon tea to late-night beach bashes, the '60s crowd returned. In the 1920s Torremolinos had only 3,000 inhabitants. During the same period, the town's English castle, as it has come to be known, began taking in veterans of WWI, what would be the first foreign wave. Today, Torremolinos, once a strategic coastal town named for the Molinos de la Torre or water mills powered by the abundant natural springs in the area, entertains as many as 250,000 people in high-season.

Sightseeing

The recently renovated **Paseo Maritimo** walkway runs wide and long for seven km (4.4 miles), separating the concrete from the gray sand and sea. Six beaches merge into one endless sandy stretch with little to distinguish them. Those to the west are nearest the more interesting areas of the waterfront, where bars and restaurants are plentiful with plastic windbreaks blowing in the wind. Sunbathing takes precedence over cultural activities in Torre.

Before the tourist boom, the old town was centered around **Calle San Miguel**. It is still the main artery of town, running from the **Plaza Costa del Sol** in the center, past the old neighborhoods of **El Calvario** to the beach of **Bajondillo** and west of it, **La Carihuela**, the fisherman's district. Nightly entertainment is plentiful along this stretch and in the areas known as the **Pueblo Blanco** and **La Nogalera**.

Torremolinos would not be the prototypical ruined resort town without its share of amusement parks. The nearby **Aquapark Internacional, S.A.** *(C/*

Cuba 10, ☎ 90 211 49 96, www.aquapark.es) is reputed to be the "largest aquatic park on the Costa del Sol." Fans of waterslides, wavepools and cotton candy will find it north of town on Cuba street.

The **Club el Ranchito** *(C/ Murillo Bracho 3, ☎ 95 238 31 40)* puts on spectacular horse shows that include skits by magicians. **Crocodiles Park** *(Cno. De los Manantiales, s/n, ☎ 95 211 83 18)* has the largest collection of living crocodiles in Europe. Not to be outdone, **Sea-Life** *(Puerto Deportivo de Benalmádena, ☎ 95 256 01 50)* west of Torremolinos has the largest collection of live sharks.

Where to Stay

The corral red stucco **Hostal Guadalupe** *(C/ Peligro 15, ☎ 95 238 19 37, d 30€)* is the only hostel that gets even close to the water. It is run by a former military brat from Scotland who has been living in Torre for over 20 years. Rooms are very pleasant, some with views of the water and ample patios. Each has a quality bathroom and television. Downstairs is the oh-so-popular **Restaurante Guadalupe**, where you will likely find Robert, the owner, serenading his dinner guests. The *menu del día* is international, but better than many of the waterfront restaurants and only 10€.

On the other side of the same building is **Pension Beatriz**, simple, hospitable, but not nearly as entertaining.

Hotel Miami *(C/ Aladino 14, ☎ 95 238 52 55, jmdejens@teleline.es, d 30-50€)* is a small, classical villa redesigned in the 1950s by Renaissance man Manolo Blasco, painter, writer and second cousin of Pablo Picasso. The style is distinctly Andalucían, with stark but comfortable rooms situated around a swimming pool and gardens, and balconies looking onto the sea 150 feet away.

Camping Torremolinos *(Ctra Cádiz-Barcelona, km 228, ☎ 95 238 26 02)* is east of town off the busy *autopista* Málaga-Torremolinos. This is a small camping site with only the necessary facilities – a little market, camper hookups and gas, access to the beach and lights at night.

Where to Eat

El Levante *(C/ Bulto 26, ☎ 95 237 27 34)* is a rustic restaurant, full of character and long popular with the locals in the fishing neighborhood of La Carihuela. El Levante offers home cooking coastal-style, with an emphasis on seafood and a bevy of *tapas* and *raciones* (larger servings meant to be shared).

To go upscale without straying from seafood (which is hard to do along the Costa del Sol at any rate), consider **El Roqueo** *(C/ Carmen 35, ☎ 95 238 49 46)*. It is considered one of best of Torre's restaurants, serving up fresh seafood either grilled (*a la parilla* or *a la plancha*), salted (*a la sal*) or fried (*frito*). Paella is another popular and delicious dish, but reserve ahead if you plan to have it.

■ Nerja

Ahh, at last a resort town on the Costa del Sol that doesn't feel like a resort town on the Costa del Sol. Nerja is no longer the best-kept secret on the southern Mediterranean Coast, but it has managed to retain a sense of qui-

etude, charm and beauty. The old streets are crooked then straight, narrow and cobbled into an entertaining maze. Its ancient caves attract as many tourists as the small beaches lying in little crooks, below and between cliffs with stone stairs to reach them. And off the main plaza is the Balcón de Europa, a corner perch high atop a cliff with beautiful views far out over the Mediterranean Sea.

Useful Information

The **tourist office** is on *Calle Puerta del Mar 2, ☎ 95 252 15 31.* Buses arrive at the **estacíon de autobus** *(Avda de Pescia, ☎ 95 252 15 04)*. There are 15 or more buses per day runing to Málaga (1½ hours), three to Granada (two hours) and two to Sevilla (4½ hours).

Sightseeing

Watch the sunset over the Mediterranean from the **Balcón de Europa**, a *mirador* built over the ruins of a ninth-century castle that was destroyed by the British in the 19th century. It sits above the Playa de la Caletilla on the edge of the old town built by the Christians at the end of the 15th century, after the Arabs had been ousted from the land. From the Balcón, the Playa del Salón can be reached or follow the Paseo de Carabineros past a number of smaller beaches, the jardines de Europa and finally to the long, sprawling and often-crowded **Playa de Burriana**.

The heavily touristed **Cuevas de Nerja** (caves) are 4½ km (2.7 miles) north-east of the town. This immense underground cathedral contains over two km (1.2 miles) of caverns adorned with cave art dating to the Paleolithic era. In one of its larger chambers the Sala de la Cascada has been installed, serving as an auditorium with a 600-person capacity where classical and flamenco music shows are held in the summer. Flag down a taxi or hop on a municipal bus to reach the site.

Where to Stay

A great, affordable place to stay in Nerja is the **Hostal Marisal** *(Balcón de Europa 3, ☎ 95 252 01 99, d 35-45€)*, on the corner of the Balcón de Europa. In the morning you may wake up to the sounds of a South American band playing Beatles music and, when the sun goes down, the views of the Mediterranean from the sea-facing rooms are splendid. Rooms and bathrooms are new and fresh-feeling, with balconies and televisions. Book ahead and pick up the keys at the small wooden podium in the restaurant downstairs.

Next door is the more lavish **Hotel Balcón de Europa** *(Balcón de Europa 1, ☎ 95 252 08 00, d 115€).* Its rooms enjoy their own spectacular views and patrons can take advantage of the semi-private beach at the foot of the cliff.

Small **Hostal Estrella del Mar** *(C/ Bellavista 5, ☎ 95 252 04 61, d 25-35€)* is not a bad choice either. Situated in a quiet area a few minutes walk from the Balcón de Europa, its rooms are comfortable and airy, some with terraces and views of the sea.

Nerja has its own government-run **Parador** *(C/ Almuñecar 8, ☎ 95 252 05 50, d 95-120€)*, but it is in a modern building and thus lacks the charm that

characterizes the majority of its kind. Inside décor is contemporary and bright with paintings. Balconies are ample, as are the amenities.

Where to Eat

If there is one place to eat, eat and eat again in Nerja, or in Spain for that matter, it is at the open-air **Restaurante Merendero Ayo**, $$. Each afternoon a great caldron is filled to the brim with rice, saffron and seafood and, as the hungry tourists look on, a man wearing protective rubber boots that rise to his thighs stirs the flaming mix with a boat oar. Valencia has nothing on this place and its paella. When the meal is ready, customers are seated and each is served from this great big bowl of deliciousness. To reach Ayo, head east from Nerja along Playa Burriana and look for the brazen roof letters that could just as easily be spotted by a 747 flying 15,000 feet overhead.

Casa Luque *($$$, Plaza de Cavana 2, ☎ 95 252 10 04)* offers a mix of international and Spanish cuisine, with an emphasis on seafood and a hankering for such traditional dishes as *rabo de toro* (stewed oxtail) and *croquetas caseras de jamón ibérico*. They may well have the best dessert in town, a delicious mango flan. The two outdoor terraces and a *tapas* bar are usually packed in the high-season, so arrive early or late.

Granada

A full day in and around Granada could entail skiing the slopes of the Sierra Nevada, before heading to Almuñecar for an afternoon on the beach. By nightfall, you will have scoured the different landscapes of this province, the arid mountainous zone of Sierra Nevada, the fertile central valleys and, finally, the Mediterranean Coast. Whatever your destination, the sun will likely be shining overhead, for it does so 250 days each year.

The city of Granada and the popular ski resort El Sol y Nieve has brought this land of sun and ski notoriety. But these are not the secrets of the Granada Province. Off the shores of its Costa Tropical are shipwrecks and deep-water tunnels teeming with marine life. Its plains are littered with ancient caves and villages that time seems to have passed by. Within its mountain confines are snowy flats, challenging crags, trails of staggering variety and soaring perches overlooking a land that for centuries has been dependent on agriculture. Cereals, sugarcane and tobacco are the staples here, though olive trees, a host of fruit trees and vineyards abound.

■ Granada

The city of Granada, the once mighty stronghold of the Moors, is the province's capital and cultural epicenter while the Sierra Nevada mountains are the heart of its adventure sports scene. But there are other towns and places in between worth a visit, namely the cave-strewn town of Guadix, the wilderness areas of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Alpujarras villages in the lush foothills and valleys of the Sierra Nevada. and the beach resorts of the Costa del Sol.

Granada lies at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountains and stretches into the flat, fertile plains of the Vega. Its 300,000 inhabitants navigate the streets and sidewalks of a cityscape that appears, at least upon first inspection, dominated by drab high-rise buildings from the '70s. Don't be dismayed;

a rich architectural heritage forged by Spanish and Mudéjar influences colors the city in unexpected and spectacular ways. I've lived in Granada, Barcelona and Madrid. I prefer the oriental air of Granada, the steep and dark slopes of its oldest remaining neighborhood, the gypsies and the hippies and the Moroccans selling jalabas and incense. Its Catedral, Alhambra Palace and ancient Moorish city, the Albaicín, are among Spain's most alluring attractions.

Apart from its agricultural and tourism industries, the city is known for the quality craftsmanship of guitars, pottery, and various wood marquetry products. The dry climate here ranges from bone-chilling nights and occasional snow in January to the unrelenting heat of July and August (up to 40°C/104°F). The spring and fall, however, have dependably fantastic, sunny weather with heavy rain only occasionally.

Students, many of which are international, account for about 20% of the population and undoubtedly inject "life" into the nights. Granadinos speak in clipped phrases: "*mas o menos*," which means "more or less," comes off sounding like "*ma o meno*." To thank someone in Granada you say "*gracia*" rather than "*gracias*." The locals bear the stamp of their dark-skinned Arabic predecessors in appearance and are renowned throughout Spain for their "*mala folla*," which, roughly translated, means bad humor. Such regional stereotyping is common in Spain just as it is in the US, where New Yorkers are occasionally considered unfriendly by Southerners or Kentuckians thought of as backwards hillbillies by Northerners. Enlightened world travelers realize that broad generalizations are for the birds and they rarely do a complex and beautiful place such as "Grana" justice.

■ History

"Granada is not just the Alhambra, the Albaicín or the royal chapel: Granada is a road which brings us to the history of the Arabs, the Romans, the discovery of America." Antonio Illescas, Head of Studies of Spanish Schools Granada

Traces of settlements in Granada have been dated to the Neolithic Age. The city itself was most likely founded by the Iberians in the fifth century BC. When the Romans colonized southern Spain they built their own city here and called it Illiberis. The Romans gave way to the Vandals and in 711 AD the Arabs invaded the peninsula. With the help of local Jews they conquered the city and named it Granada.

> **The word Granada** may have been derived from the similar Spanish word for pomegranate (a locally abundant fruit that appears on the city's coat of arms) or from its Moorish name Karnattah, meaning "hill of strangers."

The Moorish empire soon stretched far into northern Spain. Boosted by its close proximity to the trade ports on the Mediterranean, the city's silk trade flourished. Increasing Arab persecution of Christians hastened the Reconquest led by the Catholic monarchs. After successive wars with Christian Castile, the Arabs began to seek military aid from Morocco and as a result the city underwent a rapid process of "Arabization."

After 1340, when the battle of Río Salado left much of the Mediterranean in Christian hands, Granada adopted a policy of isolation, effectively cutting itself off from Castilian influence. It was in this period that Yusuf I (1333-54) and Muhammad V (1354-59 and 1362-91) finished building the Alhambra.

By the 15th century the Moors had been forced to withdraw to their only remaining stronghold, Granada. The city, and with it the last of Moorish Spain, fell to the Roman Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabela at the Alhambra in 1492. Moslems and Jews were ultimately forced out of the country or made to convert to Christianity during an intense period of ethnic cleansing. The splendor that had characterized Granada under the Moors ebbed until a new university had been established and all the cultural and monumental trappings of the new Christian Granada had begun to take shape.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Train: The Granada train station is 1½ km (.9 mile) west of the center on Avenida de Andaluces, off Avenida de la Constitucion (☎ 958 27 12 72). Three trains run daily to and from Antequera and Sevilla and to and from Almería. To Madrid there is a daily Talgo at 3:40 pm as well as a night train. One train runs daily to Valencia and Barcelona. Though Granada is not on a high-speed line, travel within Andalucía via the train is a little faster than the bus and a little more expensive. The RENFE website (www.renfre.com) has an up-to-date listing of all routes.

By Bus: Granada's bus station is three km (1.9 miles) northwest of the center on Carretera de Jaén s/n, the continuation of Avenida de Madrid (☎ 958 185 480). From the central station it is possible to find bus companies connecting Granada with all the provinces of Spain as well as some companies with international destinations. Buses do not run, however, to nearby destinations such as Fuente Vaqueros, Viznar, and the Estación de Esqui Sierra Nevada. These are best reached by rental car or taxi.

The main bus company in Andalucía is **Alsina Graells** (www.alsinagraells.es). You can check times and prices and book tickets online. You can also reserve tickets by telephone, but you'll have to go to the bus station 45 minutes before the bus leaves to pick-up and pay for the tickets and, unfortunately, there isn't a special line for pre-reserved tickets. Alsina Graells runs to **Las Alpujarras** three times daily, **Córdoba** eight times daily, **Sevilla** nine times daily, **Málaga** 14 times daily and Jaén, Baeza, Ubeda, Cazorla, Almería, Almunecar and Nerja several times daily.

Another bus company, **Autobuses Madrid-Granada, SA** *(☎ 91 Mendez Alvaro)* runs to and from Madrid's Estacion del Sur. This takes about five hours, stopping once at a café with bad sandwiches and coffee, and costs 13€. Consignment lockers cost 2€ for 24 hours and there is a large cafeteria in the station with good sandwiches (*bocadillos*). Travel by bus is normally the cheapest alternative and definitely the best-connected of Spain's transportation choices. To get into the city from the bus station, it is best to get a taxi and ask to be taken to Plaza Nueva. Bus number 3 will also take you to the center along Gran Vía.

Transportation in the City

With Granada's two major attractions perched on steep, opposing hillsides, the **Mini Bus** *(☎ 900 71 99 00)* can be a savior. The small red and white buses

pick up passengers at the Plaza Nueva and Gran Vía and shuttle them throughout the Alhambra and Albaicín areas. You shouldn't have to wait more than 15 minutes to catch one of these mini buses. Each is marked with the destination, either the Alhambra, the Albaicín loop or the Sacromonte route that runs on Thursday and Sun. from 11:30 pm until 1:30 am and Fri. and Sat. from 11:30 pm until 3:30 am. If you plan to stay in a hotel around the Alhambra or make frequent trips into the Albaicín, you probably won't want to make the hike after the second or third time. A single pass costs .85€ and a pass for 21 trips costs 10€. An unlimited pass for 30 days costs 27€.

It is not possible to book **taxis** in advance in Granada. But if you phone (☎ 958 28 06 54) for a taxi within Granada, it rarely takes longer than 10 minutes for them to arrive. There are a number of taxi lines: in front of the bus station, in front of the train station, in front of the Plaza de Triunfo, in Plaza Nueva, in Fuente de las Batallas and in front of the Corte Ingles.

■ Tourist Information

The **Granada Regional Tourist Office** *(El Corral de Carbon, Calle Mariana Pineda, ☎ 958 22 59 90)* is in an ancient Moorish building that was once a cottage for arriving traders. A smaller tourist office is east of Puerta Real *(Plaza de Mariana Pineda 10 bajo, ☎ 958 22 35 27)*. Operating hours for both are Mon.-Fri. 9 am to 7 pm, and Sat. and Sun. 10 am to 2 pm. Organized tours are available through **Granavision** *(☎ 958 13 58 04)* costing around 25€, depending on what you want to see and do.

■ Important Contacts

Local Police: Huerta Rasillo 6, ☎ 958 29 53 03 or 092.

Granada Health Service: Avda. del Sur 11, ☎ 958 02 70 00.

Hospital Virgen de las Nieves: Avda. de las Fuerzas Armadas s/n, ☎ 958 24 11 00.

Emergencies/Breakdowns: ☎ 900 75 07 50 or customer service, ☎ 900 76 07 60.

City Hall: Plaza Mariana Pineda 10, ☎ 958 24 81 00.

University of Granada: Hospicio Viejo s/n, ☎ 958 24 30 25.

Central Post Office: Puerta Real, s/n, ☎ 958 22 11 38.

Post Office Information: ☎ 902 19 71 97.

THE TOURIST VOUCHER

If you plan to visit all or many of Granada's sights, you'll want to buy this convenient card that saves 30% off normal ticket prices. It allows one direct entry (without passing through the ticket office) to the major monuments any day of the week during open hours. The following monuments are included: Alhambra and Generalife; Cathedral; Royal Chapel; Monastery of Cartuja; Monastery of San Jeronimo; Parque de las Ciencias. The voucher also includes 10 bus trips on any of the city's buses. The only major exceptions are visits to the Archaeological Museum and Fine Arts Museum, where the discount is lowered to 25%. While all of the aforementioned sites can be visited with this voucher at any time during opening hours,

visits to the Nasrid Palaces of the Alhambra must be made during the day and time printed on the entrance passes to the Alhambra. This is due to the small corridors of the palaces, the heavy crowds and conservation concerns. To get an entrance time and day for the Nasrid Palace, you need to make arrangements when purchasing the tourist voucher. The voucher can be purchased with cash for 18€ at the Alhambra and Royal Chapel ticket offices, or by credit card at the following banks for 20€: Caja General de Ahorros de Granada *(Plaza Isabel la Católica 6)* and the Centro Commercial Neptuno *(Calle Arabial s/n)*. Information is available at bono-turistica@caja-granada.es.

■ Sightseeing

The Alhambra

The crowning jewel of Granada, the Alhambra Castle comprises lush gardens, ornate fountains and lavish palaces amid scarred fortifications and scurrying tourists. In the shadows of the Sierra Nevadas, it sits atop a hill overlooking the city, the legacy of two distinct cultures, a monument to Spain's multi-ethnic origins and its mono-cultural destiny.

The name Alhambra derives from an Arabic word meaning "red castle," perhaps owing to its earthen towers and walls that, in sunlight, radiate golden hues.

The earliest construction was begun for military reasons in the ninth century when the first kings of Granada, the Zirites, had their castles and palaces on the hill of the Albaicín across from the early Alhambra. It wasn't until 1238, under the control and expansion of the Nasrites, that the Alhambra began to take shape as a residence of kings. By the end of their rule, the Alhambra would include the *alcazaba* (fortress), *alcazar* (palace) and a *medina* (small city).

Under this dynasty, Muhammad Al-Ahmar, the Alhambra's founder, began work on the restoration of the old fortress, which his son, Muhammed II, completed after his death. The palaces, called **Casa Real Vieja** (Old Royal House or Palace), date to the 14th century and are the work of two powerful kings, Yusuf I and Muhammed V. The former oversaw construction of the **Cuarto de Comares** (Chamber of Comares), the **Puerta de la Justicia** (Gate of Justice), the baths and some of its towers. His son, Muhammed V, added some additional rooms and fortifications, and further beautified the palaces with the **Cuarto de los Leones** (Chamber of the Lions).

When the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, conquered the city in 1492, the Alhambra became a Christian court. Numerous structures were built for prominent citizens, as well as military garrisons, a church and a

Franciscan monastery. Emperor Charles V made the most controversial alterations, including building the palace that bears his name in the center of the compound. Other Austrian kings left more subtle impressions on the Alhambra.

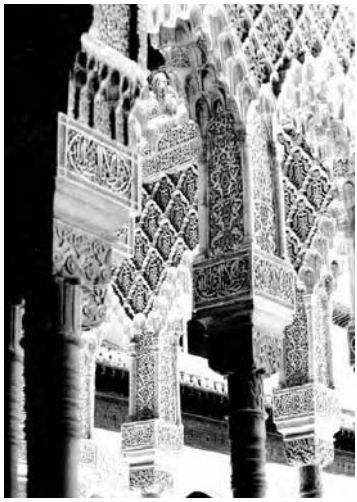
In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Alhambra fell into neglect, its salons turned to dung heaps, its taverns overrun by thieves and beggars. During this period the American writer Washington Irving took up residence in the decrepit castle. His experiences and numerous legends surrounding the Alhambra would later be immortalized in his book, *Tales From the Alhambra*. Another writer, Richard Ford, captured this sad period of the Alhambra's existence poignantly when he wrote, "Thus bats defile abandoned castles, and the reality of Spanish criminals and beggars destroy the illusion of this fairy palace of the Moors."

Napoleon's troops, who controlled Granada from 1808-1812, converted the palaces of the Alhambra into barracks and ultimately left two of the towers, the Torre de Siete Suelos and the Torre de Agua, in ruins. The problems continued until the Alhambra was declared a national monument in 1870. As an interesting side note, the Koran supports the Muslim ideal that heaven is a garden nourished by running water. Some point to this in reasoning that the Alhambra was an Arabic attempt to create heaven on earth. These days the Alhambra is host to nearly 8,000 visitors a day. It is looked over and cared for religiously and has been restored to a reasonable semblance of its former glory.

The Alcazaba: Built upon the ruins of a ninth-century castle, the Alcazaba is the oldest part of the Alhambra. At the entrance is the cheery Jardin de los Adarves, also called the Jardin de los Poeta, which looks out on the Torres Bermejas. The walled enclosure is flanked by two towers, the Homenaje and the Quebrada, and contains the elaborate interior of the Torre de las Armas and the magnificent Torre de la Vela, the tallest tower. This tower offers the best vantage point to look out over the city and houses a bell rung on special occasions by young girls hoping to ward off spinsterhood – nowadays a fairly far-fetched idea.

La Casa Real (The Royal House or Palace): To distinguish these Nasrite *alcazars* (palaces) with their courts and surrounding structures from the Christian buildings of the Alhambra, La Casa Real is often referred to as the Casa Real Vieja (Old Royal House). In keeping with Muslim tradition, reception salons and the royal apartments known as the Chamber of the Lions accompany the palaces. These once and again luxurious chambers are the work of Muhammed V, and display the full talents of Granada's Muslim artists. Inside, the chamber has an almost tranquilizing effect, so delicate is its architectural detail.

Cuarto de los Leones: The Court of the Lions, right, displays a harmonious merging of East and West styling as its columns surround a 12-sided marble fountain resting on the backs of 12 lions that feed water throughout the courtyard. Water was seen as a sign of prosperity and



power and is an essential decorative element throughout the palaces. Four large halls border the courtyard. Entering from the Court of the Myrtles is the **Sala de los Mozarabes**, whose name is allegedly derived from the three stalactite arches forming the entrance to the Court of the Lions. Opposite, the **Sala de Abencerrajes** is decorated with ornamental knots called *lazo* and cast in light by 16 intricate fretwork windows. The **Sala de los Reyes** on the east is divided into three sections, each corresponding with picturesque porticos separated by double arches of *mozarabes* (stalactites). The **Sala de las Dos Hermanas** north of the court earns its name from two large marble stones flanking the central fountain and spout. Adjoining it is the **Sala de los Ajimeces**, its two balconies overlooking the **Garden of Daraxa** on either side of the **Mirador de Daraxa**, a bedroom of the Sultana in the style of a bay window. From here you enter the **Peinador de la Reina**, also known as the Tocador, an open gallery and small tower designed as the residence of the Empress Isabel.

Other remnants of the Christian occupation include the **Church of St Mary**, built upon the site of the former royal mosque, and a *parador*, the **Monastery of St Francis**, erected on an Arab palace. Here Ferdinand and Isabella were temporarily entombed before being moved to their permanent resting place in the Capilla Real. The Palace of Carlos V, otherwise known as the Casa Real Nueva, was erected as an indulgent residence to mirror the palace of the defeated Muslims. Pedro Machuca, a former student of Michelangelo, undertook construction in 1526. The palace is roughly a square with two inner areas, one in Tuscan style, and another with Ionic pillars.

Generalife: The name Generalife translates as "garden of paradise." Its intricate gardens and patios were given over to the Venegas family after the Catholic monarchs conquered the city. A long promenade leads first to the **Patio de la Acequia**, the most vibrant aspect of the Alhambra complex. Surrounding it is the northern portico called the Mirador, framed by five elegant arches and three marble arches to the rear. On the western side is a gallery of 18 arches, and through the north portico is the **Patio de los Cipreses**, centered by an undulating pool. Small ponds are scattered among the oleanders and myrtles. Following a stone staircase you will discover the **Upper Gardens**, formerly olive groves which today sports modern gardens, an esplanade and the most unusual stairway lined by cascading waterfalls. Follow it past an unattractive, multi-storied building to the open-air stage where the International Festival of Music and Dance is held each year.

Museums: The **Alhambra Museum** *(Palacio de Carlos V, Alhambra, ☎ 958 22 91 05)*, inside the Alhambra grounds, is open Tues.-Sat. 9:30 am-2:30 pm. The **Museum of Fine Arts** *(Palacio de Carlos V, Alhambra, ☎ 958 13 00 18)* occupies the second floor of the 16th-century Palace Carlos V next to the Alhambra. It contains the Granadian art of Fray Sanchez Cota, Pedro de

Mena and Alonso Cano. From April through October its opening hours are Tues. 2:30-8 pm, Wed. to Sat. 9 am-8 pm and Sun. 9 am-2:30 pm. From November through March the hours are Tues. 2:30-6 pm, Wed. to Sat. 9 am-6 pm and Sun. 9 am-2:30 pm.

Tickets for the Alhambra

Daily admission to the Alhambra is limited to protect the monument. It is recommended that you book in advance at any BBV (Banco Bilbao Vizcaya) bank, online *(www.grupobbva.com/ALHAMBRA/alhambra/home.html)* or by phone *(☎ 902 22 44 60)*. This reservation system must be used at least one day in advance. You can pick up your ticket at the west entrance. Otherwise, show up early in the day, especially during high season, to guarantee entry. Waits usually begin well before the 9:30 am opening time. It is a long uphill walk from the city center, so leave plenty of time to make sure you don't miss your time slot for the Palace Nazaries. Alternatively, you can jump on the No. 32 bus that runs regularly from the center and will drop you right in front of the ticket office.

Upon entry to the Alhambra you will be assigned a time slot for the Palace Nazaries. If you fail to enter during this half-hour, you will be denied entry to this essential complex. Allow two to three hours to see the rest of the Alhambra. Most tourists prefer to visit the Alcazaba first, followed by the Palace of Carlos V (with museums) and the Palace Nazaries last. This allows you to walk along the north wall toward the Generalife.

The Albaicín

The Albaicín, the old Arabic quarters, cover a hill opposite the Alhambra. Inside its whitewashed walls is a veritable time warp, an ancient city mostly free of cars and often avoided by tourists because of its steep and narrow cobblestone streets. Do not follow their example. The Albaicín offers an enchanting glimpse of Arabic Granada, with its hidden squares, numerous terraces overlooking the Alhambra and city, not to mention the great dining and entertainment opportunities. Though the Arabic population was ethnically cleansed over 500 years ago, their influence pervades this labyrinth even now. Entering the Albaicín, you will pass many of Granada's famed *teterrias* (tea houses), as Gypsies play guitars next to loitering Moroccans and shops selling typical Granadino pottery (identifiable by the white background and strong blue shapes). Higher up the Albaicín is a visual artist's heaven, with stunning views in almost every direction.

The Zirid monarchs first established their court here in the 11th century. Little remains of that era except for parts of the wall that once circled this city, as well as the gates of El Arco de las Pesas, Elvira and Monaita. The Church of San Salvador is on the site of the Great Mosque of La Alcazaba across from the church of San Juan de los Reyes and its original minaret dating back to 13th century Nasrid dynasty. Nearby is the Church of San Nicolas. Once comfortably perched along its Mirador de San Nicolas, you will appreciate the oft-quoted Granadino line: "Give him alms woman because there is nothing as bad as being blind in Granada."

The Sacromonte

Climb past the Albaicín and find yourself high up in the Sacromonte, a mystical home of gypsies who have lived in caves here for over 600 years. Spanish

flamenco and the Sacromonte go hand in hand and you will more than likely be coerced into seeing one of its numerous flamenco shows inside a *Tablao*, a flamenco gypsy cave adorned with hand-made copper and ceramic articles typical of Granada. Avoid the shows with stages, as these are usually less authentic. In the **Rocio** or the **Gallo**, dancers will sway all around you and you may find yourself lost in the music, if not eventually lost in the Sacromonte streets.

The Plaza Nueva

The Darro River cuts a swath between the two hills of the Alhambra and Albaicín before it disappears beneath the city at the Plaza Nueva. This nexus of patio restaurants and gawking tourists was borne out of the city's need for greater space following the completion of the sprawling **Royal Chancellery**, a 16th-century Renaissance palace commissioned by the Catholic monarchs. The resulting plaza was built (after many unsuccessful attempts) atop the dwindling river and soon became a great converging point of the Granadinos and a popular spot for bullfights. In illustrating Washington Irving's book, *Tales of the Alhambra*, Joseph Pennell would spend many of his days drawing the plaza, particularly its crowning structure, the **Chancery Palace**.

The **Plaza de Santa Ana** was later added on to the Plaza Nueva and has since become an integral part of the whole. This narrow stretch runs between the Alhambra and Albaicín along Calle Sacromonte, past the **Arabic Baths** dating to the 11th century and the ruins of **El Cadi** bridge leading to the Mudéjar **Church of Santa Ana** and its portico and tower of glazed tiles inspired by Arab minarets. Restaurants and storefronts to the south and sun-drenched patios to the north line the road beneath the looming **Torre de la Vela** (Tower of the Alcazaba). The Church of Santa Ana represents the best in Granadino architecture and houses works of art by Diego de Aranda, Jose Risueno and Jose de Mora.

The food is pricier in Plaza Nueva than the rest of the Granada but the atmosphere is well worth it. Once the sun has set and the restaurants have closed, Plaza Nueva (and more particularly the areas surrounding it) is transformed into a lively dig of bars and taverns with people overflowing into the streets and plaza. Plaza Nueva is the gateway to the Alhambra, the Albaicín and the Sacromonte. A busy taxi line and Mini Bus pickup make travel to and from the Plaza a breeze. Most likely, you won't want to leave.

La Catedral

Construction on the Catedral of Granada was commissioned in 1502 shortly after the town was reclaimed from the Moors. Designed by the architect San Juan Evangelista, the Cathedral is a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance styles. The Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, were entombed in its royal chapel in 1521 and haven't moved since. *(Gran Vía 5, open Mon.-Sat. 10:30 am to 1:30 pm and 4 to 7 pm and Sun. 4 to 7 pm).*

Notable Moorish & Christian Monuments

Located in the northern front of the Cathedral, the **Royal Chapel** houses the tombs of the Catholic

Kings and a museum with paintings by Van der Weyden, King Fernando's sword and Queen Isabel's crown. *(Oficios 3, in the summer the chapel is open Mon.-Sat. 10:30 am-1 pm and Sun. 11 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm. Winter opening hours are Mon.-Sat. 10:30 am-1 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm, Sun. 11 am-1 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm.)*

Construction began on the **Monasterio de la Cartuja** in 1516 but wasn't completed until the 19th century. As a result, elements of Gothic, Baroque and Neo-Classical styles influenced its final design. *(Summer hours for the monastery are Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4-8 pm. Opening hours in winter are Mon. to Sun. 10 am-1 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm.)*

The **Monastery of San Jeronimo** was built by the Catholic monarchs in 1496 and designed by architect Diego de Silo. Its Renaissance confines are now home to Jornonimas monks. *(Rector Lopes Argueta 9, in summer open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm and Sun., 11 am-1:30pm and 4-7:30 pm. Winter opening hours are Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3-6:30 pm, Sun. 11 am-1:30 pm and 3 pm to 6:30 pm.)*

Palace Madraza was originally used as a university after its construction in 1349 under the Moorish monarch Yussuf I. Only the Chapel remains of the original structure and it is used by the University of Granada. *(Oficios 14, open Mon. to Fri. 8 am-10 pm.)*

El Bañuelo (Arab Baths) is one of the oldest surviving bathhouses in Spain, dating to the 11th century. *(Carrera del Darro 31, open Tues. to Sat. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Museums

The Archaeological Museum is located in the 16th-century Castril Palace. It houses examples of the various civilizations that once lived in Granada, including the Carthaginians, Phoenicians, Romans and Arabs. *(Carrera del Darro 41, ☎ 958 22 56 40. In the summer the museum is open Tues. 2:30-8 pm, Wed. to Sat. 9 am-8 pm and Sun. 9 am-2:30 pm. In the winter open hours are Tues. 2:30-6 pm, Wed. to Sat. 9 am-6 pm and Sun. 9 am-2:30 pm.)*

The **Jose Guerrero Center** is a beautiful 19th-century house dedicated to the work of Granadian artist Jose Guerrero. *(Oficios 8, ☎ 958 51 64 53. June through September opening hours are Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 7-10 pm. During the rest of the year hours are Tues. to Sun. 11 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm)*

The **Museum of Federico Garcia Lorca** is the famous Granadian poet's former residence. It houses paintings, manuscripts, photos and other original documents of Lorca and other artists of the era including Bonduel and Dalí. Thought to be one of the best writers of this century, Lorca met a tragic end at the hands of a Franco-inspired firing squad during the Spanish Civil War. *(Poeta Federico Garcia Lorca 4, ☎ 958 51 64 53, open Tues. to Sun. 10 am-7 pm.)*

The **Museum of Manuel de Falla** is the former home of Granada's late, great composer Manuel de Falla. Inside are various personal objects and a few paintings by Picasso. Outside are some tranquil gardens. *(Antequerela Alta 11, ☎ 958 22 94 21, open Tues. to Sat. 10 am-3 pm.)*

The five different exhibition rooms of the **Science Park Museum** include: the history of the universe; a planetarium with astronomical information; the history of the Earth; physics; and a room for children three-seven years

old. *(Avda del Mediterraneo s/n, ☎ 958 13 19 00, open Tues. to Sat. 10 am-7 pm and Sun.s, 10 am-3 pm.)*

The House of Los Tiros is a cultural enclave dating to the 16th century with an exhibition on the history of Granada. It also hosts numerous concerts, modern exhibitions and lectures. *(Pavaneras 19, ☎ 958 22 10 72, open Mon. to Fri. 2:30-8 pm.)*

The **House of the Pisas** *(Convalescencia 1, ☎ 958 22 21 44, open Mon. to Sat. 9 am-1 pm)* was once home to Spanish Saint Juan de Dios. The 16th-century house consists of 12 small rooms and three large exhibition halls filled with international arts, furniture, jewels and ceramics.

The Max Moreau Museum is dedicated to the Belgium author, who spent his last years in Granada. *(Camino Nuevo de San Nicolas 12, ☎ 958 29 33 10, open Tues. to Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-6 pm.)*

The Granadino's Own Festivales

Semana Santa (Holy Week) in Granada during the week before Easter Sunday is second in spirit and elaboration only to Sevilla. In the interim, the Granadinos celebrate a number of smaller festivals. On January 2nd the Catholic reconquest of Granada in 1492 is celebrated with street parades and a host of official ceremonies. **San Cicilio**, the local patron of Granada, is honored on February 1st with a procession, dancing and a lot of drinking. February 28th is the **Día de Andalucía**, a state holiday throughout Andalucía. The **Cruces de Mayo**, a local holiday, is celebrated May 1st with competitions in decorating the most beautiful cross with flowers. On May 26th **Mariana Pineda**, a revolutionary from Granada, was sentenced to death by King Fernando VII. The day is commemorated on the central square Mariana Pineda but is not considered a holiday. The patron of Granada, the **Virgen de las Angustias**, is celebrated on September 29th with processions and the donating of flowers to the Virgin.

■ Spectator Sports

The Bullfight

The original bullring in Granada burned down in the early 1900s. The newer bullring, a striking Neo-Mudéjar structure first inaugurated in 1928, has recently become a trendy destination for food, nightlife and major concerts. Where the spaces beneath the grandstands once housed carpentry and auto workshops, there are now a variety of restaurants and bars. The first bar, **Tendido 1**, was the brainchild of the ring's revitalization, Jesus Carillo, who unfortunately died before he could see his vision completed. To this add the modern music bar **El Tercer Aviso**, a flamenco bar called **Ole y Ole**, the gourmet restaurant **La Ermita** and the typically Andalucían tavern **La Gran Taberna**.

And of course, there is the awesome spectacle of the bullfights (*corridas*), which are held from March to November. The biggest *corridas* take place during Granada's annual Corpus Christi fair in late spring. The bullring is lo-

cated on Plaza de Toros de Granada *(☎ 958 27 24 51, fax 958 27 24 56, empresamiranda@sisapi.es)*.

Sporting Venues

Patronato Municipal de Deportes is the Granada national soccer team's home stadium *(Antonio Dalmases s/n, ☎ 958 12 11 17, fax 958 13 43 11, www.pmdgranada.org, pmd@pmdgranada.org)*. **Granada Club de Gold** (golf course) is located on Avenida de Los Cosarios s/n *(☎ 958 58 44 36)* and open all day in the summer and from 8:30 am to 6 pm in the winter. The **Complejo Deportive el Zaidin** *(P. Torre de Morales s/n, ☎ 958 81 90 70)* is a multi-sport complex with indoor swimming pool *(open Mon.-Fri., 8 am to 11 pm, Sat. and Sun., 8 am to 10 pm)*, tracks and tennis courts *(both open from 10 am to 10 pm)*.

■ Nightlife

There are two main bar districts in Granada, **Pedro Antonio**, which attracts a younger and rowdier crowd, and **Plaza Nueva**, which caters to an older crowd and many international students. The festivities don't usually get going until around 11 pm and by 3 am partiers have begun to crowd the discos. The weekly ***Guía de Granada*** (.60€), available at kiosks, has an up-to-date listing of specials and attractions in these two areas, while the free pamphlet, ***YOUthING***, has listings of up coming music. Or check out the posters at the Telon and Pata Palo just off Gran Vía.

Flamenco

Following the Christian Reconquest, Moors and Gypsies were forced to flee the city of Granada. Many headed to the hills, where they took up residence in the caves of the Sacromonte. Under this forced exile, the flamenco began to take shape. Though the gypsies did not invent flamenco as we know it, they certainly played a significant role in its development. Owing to the historically large Gypsy population, the origins of the flamenco run deep. High-quality shows can be found throughout the city, the most popular of which are high up the street Camino del Sacromonte in the caves. Shows are typically divided into *espactaculos*, or shows that cater mostly to tourists with extravagant dance ensembles, and *pena flamencas*, which offer a purer form of singing and guitar playing. You shouldn't pay more than 20€ for a show.

LEARNING ABOUT FLAMENCO

La Chumbera *(Camino del Sacromonte s/n, ☎ 958 22 71 29)* is the international center for Gypsy Studies and host of periodic performances of young flamenco as well as a flamenco training school.

The **Zambra Maria La Canastera** (Sacromonte 86, ☎ 958 121 183) is a museum dedicated to flamenco in the Sacromonte. You need to arrange an appointment to visit during opening hours, Mon.-Fri. 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm, and Sat. and Sun. noon to 2:30 pm.

In the Sacromonte it is easy to find a flamenco show and in some cases you'll be privileged enough to witness a free, impromptu performance in the street. While the cave dancers recommend you make an appointment, this is necessary only during the high tourist season of the summer. **Cueva la Rocio** *(Camino del Sacromonte 70, ☎ 958 22 71 29)* hosts some of Granada's most respected flamenco shows. There is no stage (which is not a bad thing), just one long corridor lined with chairs and dancers swaying in-between.

Cueva los Tarantos *(Sacromonte 9, ☎ 958 22 45 25)* and Venta del Gallo *(Sacromonte, Barranco de Los Negros 5, ☎ 958 22 05 91)* also offer fine flamenco shows in the caves.

Sala de Fiestas del Principe *(Campo del Principe 7, ☎ 958 22 80 88),* near the bullring, puts on more extravagant, staged shows that are pricier than those at the caves. **Reina Mora** *(Mirador de San Cristobal, Ctra De Murcia, s/n, ☎ 958 40 12 65, reina@granadinfo.com)* has a program that includes a guided walking tour of the Albaicín followed by a flamenco show in a gypsy cave with a free drink and two-way transportation from you hotel. The cost is 30€.

Theaters & Cinema

The two most popular theaters are the **Teatro Alhambra** *(Molinos 56, ☎ 958 22 04 47)* and the **Teatro Isabel la Católica** *(Acera del Casion, ☎ 958 22 15 14).* Ticket prices vary depending on the performance, but generally cost 20€.

One of the best ways to learn Spanish is by watching the many American movies that have been translated or subtitled in English. The best theaters are **Multicines Neptuno** and **Cinema Neptuno 2000** *(Centro Comercial Neptuno, Arabial s/n, ☎ 958 52 04 12, six screens and 15 screens)* and **Cinemas Alhambra 15** *(Centro Comercial Alcampo, Carretera Jaén s/n, www.cineciudad.com, 15 screens).* The smaller **Aliatar Cinema** *(Recogidas 2, ☎ 958 26 19 84)* favors art-house films.

HAMMAN (ARAB BATHS)

The Baños Arabes *(Santa Ana 16, ☎ 958 22 99 78, fax 958 22 73 68, www.grupoalandalus.com/hmmam.html, hammam@grupalandalus.com)* are just past the Plaza Nueva in Plaza Santa Ana on the steep hill below the Alhambra. After you strip to your bathing suit, you'll be ushered past modern showers to the warm baths. Stretch out and soothe your body as you wait for a massage or tiptoe into the chilly spring waters in the room next door. A typical treatment costs about 15€ and could last as long as two hours.

Around Pedro Antonio de Alarcon

This is the wildest area and most popular with smooching teenagers atop hideously loud Vespas (one might wonder why they take pains to make them even louder). The festivities begin around 10 pm from Thurs. to Sat. with the typical *botellón*, in which partiers bring bottles and jars of Sangria with cups and meet to drink in the square. The bars get busy a little while later and some don't close until 6 am. I recommend hitting up the **Chupeterias** (shot

houses) first and trying to win a free shirt. The many bars eventually funnel their crowds into **Camelot** or another of the popular discos in the area. Between Pedro Antonio and Plaza Nueva is **Planta Baja** *(Calle Horno de Abad 11),* one of Granada's best disco bars. The place hosts regular concerts by such notables as flamenco guitarist Flaco Jimenez. Admission varies, but is usually 3€.

Around Plaza Nueva

Plaza Nueva has more class than its younger, wilder brother Pedro Antonio. Though the plaza itself is home to mostly restaurants, just around the corner toward the Albaicín are a handful of very good *bodegas*, pubs, bars and discos. **Antigua** is a small bar with good Sangria where many Spaniards like to start off the night. ***Granada 10*** (Carcel Baja) the king of Granada's discos, is a few blocks up. Towering ceilings and lush furnishings complement its vibrant interior, but you'll have to dress nicely to get in and don't show up before 1 am *(Carcel Baja s/n, ☎ 958 256 640).* A hike up the Sacromonte is well worth it as you pass by **Jauja** *(Calle Sacromonte),* a bohemian dive that is part-bar, part-pool hall and a lot of cheesy American music. At the top of Sacromonte is **Camborio**, a disco inside a labyrinth of caves. Catch a taxi or hop on the Sacromonte mini-bus. The entry fee is 4€ and includes a free drink.

■ Where to Stay

In & Around the Alhambra

If you can afford it, **The Alhambra Palace** *($$$$, Peña Partida 2, ☎ 958 22 14 68, fax 34 958 22 64 04, www.h-alhambrapalace.es)* is *the* place to stay in Granada. The neo-Moorish hotel is situated on the hill of the Alhambra, with views of the Sierra Nevada and Realejo district of the city. The two bars, Arabic Grill and luxurious rooms reflect a lavish Belle Époque styling with every possible amenity included. Book well in advance, or someone more famous might get your room. Doubles cost 138€ and suites cost 210€.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Parador San Fransisco *($$$$, Alhambra, ☎ 958 22 14 40, fax 958 22 22 64, from US ☎ 800-343-0200)* occupies a former convent founded by the Catholic monarchs on the grounds of the Alhambra with great views of the Generalife and the Sacromante. Room prices range from 198€-252€.

Hotel America *($, Alhambra 53, ☎ 958 22 74 71)* is next door to the Alhambra but has little else going for it. The 13 simple rooms are decorated with local furnishings and fill up fast. In the summer, regional meals are served on the patio. Prices range from 48€ to 72€.

If you insist on being near the Alhambra, but the nicer hotels are full, the **Hotel Washington Irving** *($$, Paseo del Generalife 2, ☎ 958 22 75 50, fax 958 22 88 40)* is a viable choice. Built in honor of the American writer who lived in the Alhambra in the 1800s, the Washington Irving looks as if it hasn't been updated since that time. The prices, however, are much more reasonable

than the surrounding hotels and many of the rooms look out onto the Alhambra walls across the street. Parking is conveniently just up the road.

In & Around the Center

Located on the busy, tree-lined Carrera del Genil next to El Corte Ingles department store, the **Hotel Tryp Albayzin** *($$, Carrera del Genil 48, ☎ 958 22 00 02, fax 958 22 01 81, www.trypnet.com, tryp@trynet.com)* is a short walk to all of Granada's sights. The rooms are decidedly modern and attract a number of British and German tour groups each year. Prices start at 72€ and top out at 120€.

Hotel Reina Cristina *($$, Tablas 4, ☎ 958 25 32 11, fax 958 25 57 28, www.eel.es/Granada/hotels/rcris/rcris.htm)* is in the lively Plaza de la Trinidad. The rooms have air conditioning, telephone, TV and, like the interior entrance patio, are a strange cross between art deco and Neo-Mudéjar styling, which, surprisingly, works. Federico Garcia Lorca, the famed Spanish poet, spent his last days here in hiding before Franco's cronies arrested him and later murdered him. There is also a small English-language library. If you are a light sleeper, avoid this place, because everything is tiled and the area can get loud at night. Doubles cost 80-101€ and suites cost 310€.

Hotel Navas *($$, Navas 24, ☎ 958 22 59 59, fax 958 22 75 23, alixares@jet.es)* is on a pedestrian street lined with *tapas* bars in the city center.

In the Realejo neighborhood beneath the Alhambra hill, **Hotel Molinos** *($, Molinos 12, ☎ 958 22 74 67, fax 958 22 74 89, www.eel.es/molinos/defaulti.htm, hotelmolinos@usa.net)* has nine small rooms with baths and free Internet access. The place is clean with a modern feel and was listed in the 1996 *Guinness Book of World Records* as "The Narrowest Hotel in the World." Prices start at 42€ for a single and run to 96€ for a quad-room.

In & Around the Albaicín

Casa del Alijarife *($$, Placeta de la Cruz Verde 2, ☎ 958 22 24 25, fax 34 958 22 24 25, most@retemail.es)* is the only hotel located within the Albaicín. It is a charming villa in what was once a 17th-century mansion, and few travelers stumble across it. The Andalucian-styled *casa* has a handful of rooms with showers and a large patio with a Moorish fountain and great views of the Alhambra. Be forewarned, it is a good, steep hike to get here, but the Albaicín mini-bus can get you close. Near the base of the Albaicín is **Hotel Macia** *($$, Plaza Nueva 4, ☎ 958 22 75 36).*

Budget Accommodations

Hostal Huespedes Sanchez, *$-$$$,* is little more than a converted house on the inside. Don't bother looking for a front desk; just ring the bell and the English-speaking owner will greet you. I recommend the rooms with private baths and air conditioning in the summer. Each room has a TV and central heating and some share a bath. Singles cost 12€, doubles cost 23€, and triples cost 30€. There is a 10% discount with a Hostels of Europe Card.

If you want to be far from everything, stay at the **Albergue Juvenile** *($-$$, Camino de Ronda 171, ☎ 958-28-43-06, fax 958-28-52-85, reserves@inturjoven.junta-andalucia.es),* a cheap youth hostel close to the train station. This is communal living all the way: singles stay in rooms with two double beds and central heating. The rooms are plain but functional and the communal facilities include a TV room, game room, dining room and pub-

lic telephone. Dorm beds cost 8.50-12.90€ for travelers under age 26. For older travelers, beds are 11.50-17.25€. The reception is open 24 hours.

Hostal Austurias and **Hostal Vienna** *($$, Cuesta Gomerez 4, ☎ 34-958-227-075, Austria@arrakis.es)* are next to each other and run by the same Austrian family. The rooms are clean, simple and usually full of international travelers who seem to favor this spot. Calle Elvira is nearby with a busy nightlife and many good *tapas* bars.

Hostal Atenas *($$$, Gran Vía 38, ☎ 34-958-27-87-50, fax 34-958-28-52-71, www.moebius.es/atenas_in.htm)* is on Gran Vía, one of the two main roads leading into the city's center. All rooms are air conditioned, with complete bath, TV, and telephone. Dogs are admitted. Singles cost 27€ (with bathroom) and doubles cost 38€.

Hotel La Perla *($$-$$$, Reyes Catolicos 2, ☎ 958-22-34-15)* is on the other major thoroughfare leading to the city's center, Reyes Catolicos. The 28 rooms are simple and not the cleanest in the world. Prices start at 20€ for a single without shower, 25€ for a single with shower and 35€ for a double with full bath.

Camping

Andalucía has over a hundred registered campgrounds, many of which are sprinkled throughout the mountains of Sierra Nevada near Granada. *Refugios*, or mountain shelters, are fairly common in the many villages of the Sierra Nevada Mountains National Park, known collectively as Las Alpujaras. Some are free if you don't mind sleeping on wooden boards, while others charge a modest fee that includes breakfast. Many, however, require advance reservations, especially during the summer tourist season; others may be abandoned during the low season. A list of all the Sierra Nevada mountain refuges can be picked up at any of Granada's tourist offices.

Local law expressly forbids camping on the beaches of the Costa Tropical, but you can usually get away with it. The largest of the campgrounds near Granada is **Camping Sierra Nevada** *(1st Cat, Avda de Madrid, 107, ☎ 958 15 00 62).* Others include **Los Alamos** *(Ctra Nal. 342, ☎ 958 20 84 79)* and **Maria Eugenia** *(Ctra Nal. 342, ☎ 958 20 06 06).* An interactive map of the campsites around Granada can be found at www.granadamap.com.

■ What & Where To Eat & Drink

The products of the mountains and the Mediterranean play an integral role in Granada's cuisine. Some typical Granadino dishes include *tortillas sacromonte* (a Spanish omelet) and *jamon de Trevelez* (ham cured in the snow of one of Spain's highest villages). This ham is often combined with beans (*habas con jamon*) or potatoes and green peppers (*papas a lo pobre*). In the summer, Granadinos enjoy *gazpacho Andalucía* (a cold soup of freshly blended vegetables) and *tinto de Verano* (red wine mixed with lime soda). In the winters the main dishes are stews like *olla de San Anton* (a

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

thick stew made with various pig parts and rice and beans). Seafood is often fried and includes calamari, shrimp, red snapper and bream.

Tapas are generally free in Granada and get better with each successive drink. While some *tapas* bars start off with a simple dish of olives, others serve sandwiches with tortilla or ham and, eventually, calamari or other seafood. The Moorish influence is apparent in the spicy dishes and honey-sweets such as *bizcochada* and *torta real,* found near the Albaicín. Many restaurants serve exclusively Granadian or Moorish cuisine, though there are plenty of international restaurants as well.

> **TIP:** The ***Guía de Tapicheula*** available at most kiosks has good listings and descriptions of most of Granada's restaurants.

In the Albaicín & Sacromonte

Restaurants are localized around the Mirador de San Nicolas, Plaza Larga and Calle Panaderos. **El Ladrillo II** *($$$ Placeta Fatima)* is the first restaurant I go to when I'm here. The windows open out over a plaza high up in the Albaicín and the sleek wood furnishing give it a fancier feel than its prices (and the hefty portions) would suggest. The Barco plate (heaped with various fried seafood) is the highlight of this restaurant.

At the base of the Albaicín is **La Zumería**, Granada's most mind-warping *tetería*, or Arabic-styled tea house. Upon entering you may be overwhelmed by the smell of hashish. If you don't mind this, take a seat (on a pillow on the floor) in one of the small, private nooks and order a pot of tea or a fresh smoothie. Kasbah is another crowded *tetería*, a little more posh, a little more formal.

Mirador de Moraima *($$, Pianista Garcia Carrillo 2, ☎ 958 22 82 90)* is in the heart of the Albaicín district with gardens overlooking the Alhambra and the city. The restaurant is recognized for revitalizing the cuisine of the Moorish Al Andalus and specializes in delicate sweets. Roasted lamb, grilled Spanish sausages and codfish are also excellent.

Bar Aliator-Los Caracoles *($$, Plaza Aliatar, alto Albaicín)* specializes in snails, served spicy and called *tapiya*. If you aren't into escargots, I recommend the "Goat Kid Country Style" plate of Alpujarran ham, green peppers and fish. Top it off with a *chupito* (shot) of Galician spirit with honey.

In the Sacromonte, **Casa Juanillo** *($$, Camino del Monte, s/n)* is a popular gathering place for flamenco artists and impromptu shows overlooking the Generalife and Alhambra. The menu is based on the home cooking of the Sacromonte gypsies and includes suckling lamb chops, fried sweet pepper salad, and tortillas Sacromonte.

In & Around the Center

Just west of the Catedral is the bustling **Mercado** (San Agustin) where vendors sell fresh fruits, vegetables, hams and cheeses. If you plan a picnic in the Sierra Nevadas, this is the place to stop first. Nearby is the beautiful Plaza Bibarambla, with flower stands during the day and busy with people eating *churros con chocolate* sold in the shops spread around it.

Las Tinajas *($$$, Martinez Campos 17, ☎ 958 25 43 93)* is a distinctly Granadian establishment in the city center. Among the typical dishes served

are monkfish Mozarabe style, veal sirloin with *oloroso* sherry and Moorish cake with almonds and raspberries.

Cepillo *($$, Calle Pescaderia 9)* has excellent seafood dishes that are generally very affordable. **Restaurante Seville** *($$, Calle Oficios)* is across from the entrance to the Capilla Real. It is a pre-war establishment and one-time haunt of poet Federico Garcia Lorca. The menu is all traditional Andalucian dishes.

Alhacena de las Monjas *($$$, Plaza Padre Suarez 5, ☎ 958 22 40 28)* is composed of delightful dining rooms with vaulted ceilings in a 15th-century house. The specialty here is creating the old foods of Al-Andaluz.

Velazquez *($$, Emilio Orozco 1, ☎ 958 28 01 09)* specializes in Moorish and Andalucian cuisine but is best visited for its extensive wine cellar. **Al Andaluz**, *$$*, is a café and bar with great gyros and falafel at the foot of the Albaicín next to Plaza Nueva. Cuisine is Arabic and based on spicy meat dishes.

In the winter months, **Carmen de San Miguel** *($$$$, Plaza de Torres Bermejas 3)* is the place to eat. This restaurant specializes in unique stews that include oxtail, lamb and seafood. You'll need to make a reservation.

Tapas

These are free in Granada! You must buy a drink, of course, and the *tapas* bars are most prevalent on the road between Plaza Isabel La Católica and Plaza del Principe. Other good areas include Plaza Nueva, Plaza de Carmen and Pedro Antonio.

La Gran Taberna is a classic establishment on the corner across the street from Plaza Nueva. **Café Europa**, *$*, is an intellectual's coffee spot with hefty servings of *tapas*, friendly service and two locations around Plaza Nueva.

Restaurante León *($$, Calle Pan 3)* has reasonable prices and hearty meals, with *tapas* served at the bar during the week. **Nueva Bodega** *($$, Calle Cettimeriem 3)* specializes in omelets, soups and Milanese-style swordfish, parts of which occasionally find their way into the *tapas*.

Antigua, *$*, is a hip *bodega* just off Plaza Nueva. While the *tapas* here aren't so typically Andalucian (they even serve a funky hamburger on round three), the lively open-air atmosphere is well worth coming for. **El Meditarraneo** *($$, corner of Calle Gràcia and Veronica de la Magadelena)* serves Greek- and Turkish-styled *tapas*. For the best *tapas* in Granada, I recommend **Bar Enrique** *($$, Calle Socrates)*, with choices that branch out from the typical Andalucian *tapas* of tortilla and fried calamari.

■ Excursions from Granada

Guadix

Guadix looks like a gigantic prairie dog colony set in a desolate, eerie landscape of eroded red dirt hills, cliffs, pinnacles and ravines. White chimneys indicate the cave homes and look to have been shaped by a three-year-old modeling playdough. They function nonetheless, and the homes, some with as many as four rooms, are burrowed out of the soft dirt and reinforced by layer upon layer of whitewash. Gerald Brenan wrote, "the caves are sometimes piled on top of one another in such a way that one family tethers its pig or goat to another family's chimney." A tile floor is laid down in these newly

dug caves and wiring run throughout for electricity. These modern-day cave people will point to the fact that living in a cave is cheaper and more efficient than living in a traditional home. Were it not for the beautifully strange landscape eroded by a prehistoric lake, one might argue that living in a cave at Guadix is akin to living in a trailer park outside Pensacola, Florida.

Dirt paths rise and fall between the numerous entryways, the dirt pillars and cliffs and encourage tourists to explore them. Locals tie ferocious dogs to chains to discourage the act. It's all a curious sight in Guadix, a city that was first founded by the Roman Julius Caesar and was apparently significant enough to garner the first Christian mission in Spain in AD 70.

Guadix is located an hour east of Granada on the A-92. From the bus station in Granada, 11 Maestra buses depart for Guadix Mon.-Sat. and five run on Sun. The bus station in Guadix is on C/ Santa Rosa.

Adventures on Water

■ Diving

Of the diving shops along the Costa Tropical, **Club Nautique Diving** *(Marina del Este, Almunecar la Herradura, ☎ 958 82 75 14, www.clubnautique.com)* operates the largest and most extensive service out of Almunecar. Both PADI and NAUI certified divers have to pay for a Spanish diving permit, which costs 3€ and can be purchased at the club. Boat dives cost 14€ without gear or, with full equipment, 36€. Fragile Rock is a good beginner's dive with rocky underwater formations that are home to large conger eels, scorpion fish and breeding octopus. If you're an advanced diver, the underwater cave of the Cerro Gordo cliff is popular. The 80-m (262-foot) cave is fed by freshwater with fantastic visibility and it opens up in an enclosed cavern lit by sunlight through a ceiling hole.

■ Fishing

The province has 64 fishing reserves within the Nature Parks of Cazorla, Segura, Las Villas and Sierra Nevada that harbor mainly trout, pike and black bass. As an avid fisherman, I've tried my luck in a number of these dams and rivers and found that, by and large, the fishing here pales in comparison to the north. *But*, there is one exception and that is the trout-happy waters of the Río Frío in the foothills of the Sierra de Loja, midway between Granada city and Málaga. Nearby is the tiny trout-farming village of Río Frío, where you can take your catch and have it specially prepared at any of a number of excellent trout restaurants. The fishing season on the Río Frío is open year-round; more recently, Spain's largest brown trout (11.4 lbs) was hauled out of these waters. For information about permits, contact **Alberge de Pescadores de Río Frio** *(Riviera de Río Frio s/n, Loja, ☎ 958 32 31 77)*.

As for coastal fishing, most of the local marinas can supply you with everything you need to deep-sea fish or beach cast for brill, salmonete, herrera, besugo, dorado and bass. From July to September, swordfish are plentiful off the Costa Tropical. **Viento y Mar** *(C/ Margarita 2, Calahonda, ☎ 95 862 32 94, www.vientoymar.com)* charters sailboats from the town of Calahonda. Prices range from 210€ for a half-day in the low season to 2,611€ for a week-long voyage during high season. The boats are fully equipped and capable of holding up to eight people.

Adventures on Foot

Though parts of the **Sierra de Castril Natural Reserve** are officially known as "Cave Country," the **Cuevas de las Ventanas** in Píñar are more centralized and better maintained for tourists interested in spelunking. Man first inhabited the caves 25,000 years ago and since 1999 over 500 m (1,640 feet) of these caves have been open to the public. Admission costs 3€ and opening hours are 10 am to 7 pm *(Cueva de las Ventanas, Pinar, ☎ 958 39 47 25, fax 958 39 46 13)*. The *Ayuntamiento* (town hall) de Píñar operates a train from the village up to the caves *(☎ 95 839 47 25)*.

La Sierra Nevada

The Sierra Nevada, the most prominent chain of peaks in the Cordillera Penibética mountain range that parallels the Mediterranean Coast for some 75 km (47 miles), attained National Park status in 1999. It claims the highest peaks in the Iberian Peninsula, Mulhacén (3,482 m/11,421 feet) and Veleta (3,392 m/11,258 feet), both of which afford spectacular views of the Mediterranean Sea from their summits on clear days. All told, 16 peaks in the Sierra Nevada rise above 3,000 m (9,840 feet).

With year-round snowy tops and warm, southern European weather, the Sierra Nevada enjoys a unique situation that is popular with all types of outdoor enthusiasts, from hikers to climbers, flyers, sledders and skiers. The area's nickname, the Sierra del Sol (Mountains of the Sun), dates as far back as medieval times. The higher ranges are composed primarily of a smooth and dark mica schist that, when exposed, makes for an interesting contrast to the snow; in other areas limestone and sandstone have been deeply eroded by rivers. Ancient glacial activity has shaped many of the rises and left behind a series of 50 lakes; the last remaining glacier at Corral de Veleta only recently succumbed to the heat.

The upper reaches of the range are typically alpine and characterized by resilient herbs and thorny plants evolved to fend off the numerous herbivores and high UV rays. Mediterranean scrub claims the mid-slopes, while the fertile valleys that stretch toward the sea are green and semi-tropical, with grasslands, strands of orange and fig trees and forests of oak, poplar, chestnuts and pine. The most emblematic bird of the Sierra is the alpine accentor, a small bird common to alpine areas – only outnumbered here by the bounteous array of butterflies that flit through the air in colorful clouds of blue and brown.

Adventure on Snow

Europe's southernmost ski resort, **Sol y Nieve** *(Estación de Esqui Sierra Nevada, ☎ 958 24 91 19, bookings 958 24 91 11)*, atop the Sierra Nevada near Granada, was fully modernized in 1996 when it hosted the World Ski Championships. While the snow (*nieve*) is generally icy, the opportunity to soak up sun (*sol*) while skiing in the frequently warm climate is paramount. To combat this fierce sun, which awards Sol y Nieve with its popular reputation for warm skiing, but no doubt hampers the slope conditions, the resort has extensive snow-making capabilities. In average years, the resort operates from December to late May. There are 45 runs to choose from (four green, 18 blue, 18 red and five black) connected by 19 lifts (two of which are gondolas) that are fed by hectic crowds of skiers

jockeying for position. As with all of Spain's ski resorts, snowboarders are allowed and they usually head for the half-pipe. Rentals (a set of skis, boots and poles cost 15€) and accommodations can be found at the top. A one-day pass costs around 18€.

Ski schools include the **Escuela Española de Esqui** *(Plaza Pradollano, Monachil, ☎ 958 48 01 42)*, the **Escuela Internacional de Esqui** *(Plaza Andalucía, ☎ 95 848 00 11)* and the **Escuela Oficial de Esqui Sol y Nieve** *(Edificio Telecabina, ☎ 95 848 00 11)*. But don't miss the **Autobus Viajes Bonal shuttle** *(☎ 958 27 31 00)*, which leaves at 8:30 am from Bar Ventorrilo (Paseo del Vinolon) near the Palacio de Congresos in Granada and returns at 5:30 pm. Taxis frequently make the trip, but are expensive at 36€.

> **DID YOU KNOW?** The GR-420 road from Granada to the Sol y Nieve *resort is the highest in Europe. It is 35 km (22 miles) long.*

Two 8.6-km (5.4-mile) **cross-country** trails are in **Puerto de la Ragua** near the ski resort in the Sierra Nevada. Skis as well as sleigh and dogsled tours (starting at 15€) are available through **Aventura Polar en el Sur, S.L.** *(Administration C, España 25, ☎ 952 58 39 45, fax 952 46 31 74, www.juncosol.com/posada)*. Most of the **dog-sledding** and **horse-drawn carriage trips** depart from Borreguiles. There is also an ice-skating rink at Pradollano. Trails are numerous for **snowmobiles**, which can be rented at the Sol y Nieve ski resort. Non-skiers can also opt for the *telecabina* (7€) that departs from Pradollano and culminates at Borreguiles.

Adventures on Foot

In the summer, the ski resort becomes known as the alpine station and has most recently played host to the World Mountain Bike Championship of 2000 and the World Aerial Games of 2001. From here, the best viewpoint in the Sierra Nevada, the **Pico Veleta** (weathercock) at 3,398 m (11,145 feet) above sea level, can be reached either by the *telecabina* or by a moderately difficult **hiking trail** that takes five to seven hours, under good conditions. To go it afoot, head for the Peñones de San Francisco in Pradollano, located by the mountain shelter Refugio Universitario. Follow the road up as it passes the statue of the Virgin de las Nieves on the right and the observatory at Mojón de Trigo on the opposite side. In the winter the mostly paved trail remains passable, though you'll likely have it all to yourself. You'll pass an intersection with the road to Pradallano; if the hike is too much, turn back and follow this road down to the village. Otherwise, continue to the Pico Veleta. At the second junction, you can turn left, leave behind the asphalt, and follow the trail up to the top of the peak of Veleta with almost heavenly views of the valleys to the south, the Mediterranean Sea and, on a clear day, the blurry edge of North Africa.

Sierra Nevada Natural *(Estacíon s/n, Pinos Genil, ☎ 95 848 85 43, sierranevada@ctv.es)* offers guided trips through the Sierra Nevada National Park on foot and horseback with an emphasis on photography. One of the more popular route options is that of the Camino de los Neveros, which follows an ancient track used by the *neveros* on their way up to the summits to collect ice.

Climbing is popular in the Sierra Nevada but the peaks offer far from the best conditions to practice this sport. The Mulhacén peak is the highest in the Iberian Peninsula (3,482 m/11,421 feet) and extremely challenging for rock climbers. Its name comes from Mulay Hacén, father of the last Moorish King in Spain, Boabdil. Hacén was buried on the peak. For information on the current conditions, contact the **Federacion Andaluza de Montanismo** *(Málaga, Ant. Raiz 10, ☎ 952 39 90 04)* or **Sierra Nevada Tourist Information** *(☎* 958 24 91 19). It isn't recommended to attempt this climb without an experienced guide, as the surface is predominantly soft and crumbly shale. Information and accommodations are available in the mountain *refugio* Félix Méndez at the base of the summit, which is equipped and run by the Federation of Mountaineering.

Adventures on Wheels

The most popular **mountain biking** route in the area stretches from Pradollano to Veleta Peak. Why is it the most popular? Because it is the highest road in Europe. Follow the road from the highest area of Sol y Nieve, the Peñones de San Francisco; the road is paved until the base of Veleta, where a short hike is necessary to reach the summit. From there you can ride the more entertaining backside trail down. Don't even consider making this three-hour, 12-km (7½-mile) ride during the winter, when road conditions are terrible.

Adventures in the Air

With 16 peaks over 3,000 m (9,840 feet), the options for **paragliding** are countless. A new twist on the sport is **paraglide skiing**, which is, as it sounds, part-skiing and then nothing but air. The main launch site is from the control tower of Borreguiles. **Horizante Vertical** *(C/Nivel 6, Bubion, ☎ 958 76 34 08, www.granadainfo.com/hv)* guides paragliders over the peaks to ceilings of 5,000 m (16,400 feet). One day of rental equipment costs 50€ and a tandem flight costs 95€. The **Club de Vuelo Libre Parapente Draco** *(Ctra de la Sierra, km 8, ☎ 95 848 85 60)* guides paragliding, para-motor, two-seat flights and aerial photography trips in the Sierra.

Where to Stay

Accommodations near Sol y Nieve, the popular ski resort of the Sierra Nevada, are pricey, plentiful and usually full during ski season. Though there is nightly entertainment, *tapas* bars and occasionally open-air concerts at the resort, most skiers prefer to stay in Granada where the real action is going on and ride the bus to and from the slopes. A good, good rate for a nice double room is 75€, but don't try to hold-out for this rate. If you turn around you'll notice that all those people waiting in line behind you are willing to pay more.

☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Melia Sol y Nieve** *(Pradollano, s/n, ☎ 95 848 03 00, fax 95 848 04 58)* is a vast, reformed lodge near to the slopes (though it is not ski-in/ski-out). Its four stars mean the spacious and comfortable rooms don't come cheap, at 170€ for a double in high-season; in the summer, rates drop as low as 97€. The hotel's amenities include a Turkish bath, saunas, heated

pool, gym, Jacuzzis and spa treatments to ease those sore, rarely used skiing muscles.

☆☆ **El Ciervo** *(Edificio Penibetico, Pradollano, ☎ 95 848 04 09)* is a two-star pension with one-star hotel prices at 84€ per double. It is one of the cheaper alternatives near the slopes; the 33 rooms are recent in décor and stocked with the basics: heating, bathrooms, television, pillows, and other niceties.

The cheapest option is the **Albergue Juvenil Sierra Nevada** *(Peñones 22, ☎ 95 848 03 05, fax 95 848 01 22, s 20-30€)*. Private double rooms are available but you'll need an *albergue* youth card to book them.

Las Alpujarras

The region of the Alpujarras is a collection of valleys south from Granada sandwiched between the mountains of the Sierra Nevada and the shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea. Sometimes when you're reading a guidebook you just need an author to tell you where to go without elaboration or hesitation. Go to the Alpujarras. It is a special natural area adorned with rare Berber architecture and Moorish customs that have survived with little interference, including the system of terraced farming which makes hills look like the layers of a green wedding cake and the elaborate network of irrigation that harnesses the clear mountain streams and springs of the valleys.

The Moors who settled this area called it Al-Busherat, the grassland, to which they introduced exotic fruit tress such as the fig, the orange and the lemon tree, the latter inspiring the English writer Chris Stewart to title his book on life in the Alpujarras *Driving Over Lemons*.

> **TIP:** Today the bottled water of the Alpujarran village Lanjaron is sold in every southern gas station and supermarket in Spain. You can go take your own bottle to Lanjaron and fill it as many times as you'd like, for free.

Jarapas, colorful throws unique to the Alpujarras, can be seen hanging from the walls of cubic-white houses that always face south and traditionally have two floors; the top is the domain of the family and the bottom was, and in some cases still is, reserved for the family's livestock. Roofs are flat with slate and pierced with small, cone-shaped chimneys that emit the essence of roasting piñon nuts. Old communal laundry troughs where the women of the village once gathered to wash clothes are still apparent in the weeds.

The villages are found in two areas, those of La Alpujarra Alta, below the peaks of Sierra Nevada in tight and steep spaces, and La Alpujarra Baja, with a warmer climate and a more open terrain bordering the Mediterranean. The Valle de Lecrín sags between these two zones. Here the vanquished Moorish ruler of Granada, Boabdil, reputedly cast one last glance at his beloved city lost to the Christians before retreating far into the Alpujarras; the area would figure as the last Moorish enclave in Spain.

Getting Here

By Bus: The bus station in Granada (Avda de Jaén) is in the far west of town, best reached by taxi. **Alsina Graells** buses run three times daily to the main villages, Órgiva, Pampaneira, Bubión, Capileira and Trevélez, with stops at the smaller intermittent vil-

lages on request. Once in the villages, mass-transit connections between them are unreliable.

Locals still do their traveling on foot, and many tourists have picked up the pace. Taxis are rare but not wholly non-existent. As an alternative to hiking the narrow and winding roads, many of the villages are linked by marked scenic hiking paths through the valleys.

By Car: Take the N-323 south from Granada and at the signs for Lanjarón, the first of the Alpujarras villages, turn east.

Lanjarón

From Granada, the village of Lanjarón on the western rim of the Alpujarras serves as the gateway to the 80 or so villages within, each standing out from the grassy green surface like a mushroom just bloomed in the morning. Gerald Brenan, in *South from Granada*, wrote what travel writers have borrowed since:

"Lanjarón is a long white village, almost a town, stretched like a balustrade along the steep mountain-side. It has hot springs and two hotels to accommodate the people who come to be cured of their kidney complaints and their rheumatism. It also has a Moorish castle, built on what would seem to be an inaccessible pinnacle below the town, but captured by Ferdinand of Aragon in 1500 with the aid of his artillery. The picked garrison who were defending it surrendered, with the exception of the Negro commander who preferred to leap to his death from a tower. While this was happening the mosque, in which the civilian population had taken refuge, was blown up and everyone in it killed."

Lanjarón is the same place it was in the early 20th century but different and only changed because there are more restaurants, hotels and junk tourist shops than there were 100 years ago. The water still runs clean and clear from fountains throughout town, one of which is inscribed with a quote from the great Spanish writer Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, who himself became enamored with this region and the particular beauty of Lanjarón. It reads, "Alto y parade dejemos la pluma y tomemos los pinceles!" (Halt, let us lay down our pens and pick up our brushes!)

Pampaneira, Bubión & Capileira

These neat villages cling to slopes in a huddle over the Alpujarra's Barranco del Poqueira gorge. Their architecture is emblematic of the Alpujarran style, a look only found in the Atlas Mountains of Algeria and Morocco. Houses are built of stone quarried from the nearby mountains and then, more often than not, whitewashed – though traditionally only the interiors would have been lathered in white. Roofs are flat and waterproofed with *launas* (thin slate shingles) that are supported by round wood pillars called *umbrales*. The roofs often become terraces for the houses above. These *tinaos* are often strewn with potted plants that cascade over the edges and colorful flowers that brighten the stark yet appealing surfaces of the villages.

Trails are well marked connecting Pampaneira, the first of these villages, with Bubión and on to Capileira. The **rural tourism guide service Nevadensis** *(Plaza de la Libertad, s/n, ☎ 95 876 31 27, www.nevadensis.com, nevadensis@arrakis.es)* is located in town. Besides offering guided adventure excursions in the surrounding natural areas, the

shop serves as a free source of information and as a cheap youth hostel. Here you can pick up trail maps and pick the guides' brains; they're happy to reply in broken English.

The *pintoresca ruta* is a road on the outskirts of Pampaneira that leads to the **O-Sel-Ling** (Place of Clear Light), the center for the first Tibetan Buddhist community to be located on the Iberian Peninsula. Hiking trails from each of the three villages also approach the community, which is crowned with a pinnacled monument and on a rise with spectacular views. Call ahead to visit the center *(☎ 958 34 31 34)*.

Bubión is recognized for its Roman mines and Nasrid tower used by Ab'n Humeya's troops as a defensive garrison during clashes with the Christians. Capileira is the second highest town in Spain at 1,432 m (4,697 feet), surpassed only by the nearby Alpujarran village of Trevélez. Besides wandering like a lost dog through its zig-zag streets, you could visit the odd **Museo Alpujareño** *(C/ Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, ☎ 958 85 30 74)*, which is devoted to the region's endemic arts and customs.

Trevélez

Trevélez, at 1,476 m (4,841 feet), is the highest town on the Iberian Peninsula. It is situated on the southern slope of Mt. Mulhacén and delineated into three modest districts known as the *barrios alto*, *media* and *bajo* (high, middle and low). The stone entrance marker is adorned with a colorful ceramic image of the town and reads: "Bienvenidos a Trevelez, el pueblo mas alto de España. Deguste su buen jamon y hospitalidad." (Welcome to Trevelez, the highest town in Spain. Sample its good ham and hospitality.) Its *jamon Serrano* is the town's calling card, hung freshly butchered to cure in the dry mountain air for up to two years.

Besides the fishermen that arrive in droves to this village by the stream, climbers and hikers use it as base to climb to the summit of Spain's highest mainland peak, Mt. Mulhacén (3,479 m/11,411 feet), topped with a statue of the Virgen de las Nieves (Snow Virgin), and to explore the nearby glacier lakes, the Cañada de Siete Lagunas. Both hikes take the better part of a day and a considerable amount of effort. Trail maps can be picked up at the tourist shops in town. The adventure company **Nevadensis** *(Plaza de la Libertad, s/n, ☎ 95 876 31 27, www.nevadensis.com, nevadensis@arrakis.es)* is in the nearby village of Pampaneira. Their guides run hiking, climbing, rapelling and canyoning excursions in the Sierra Nevada range, including the climb to the peak of Mulhacén. A day of rapelling runs 27€, while a trip down a canyon can take anywhere from two to seven hours and cost up to 60€.

Where to Stay

In recent years a greater selection of hotels, hostels and *casas rurales* have been opened to the public in the Alpujarras. Lanjarón, Órgiva and Trevélez have the most to choose from. In Trevélez there is the **Hotel La Fragua** *(C/ San Antonio 4, ☎ 95 877 00 94, d 35€)*, hidden on a narrow street and well worth searching out for a relaxing stay in what feels like a country inn. Rooms are pretty, bright white and comfortably clean with television, heating and full baths. Request a room with views of the valley.

A second option is the **Pensión Mulhacén** *(Ctra de Ugijar, ☎ 95 885 85 87, d 25-40€)*; with the popular trout stream of Trevélez just a short walk away, it's often crowded with fishermen. Rooms vary, some with only a sink, others with full or half-bath and televison.

Camping Trevélez *(☎ 958 85 87 35, fax 958 85 87 35)* is one km (.6 mile) outside the town and open year-round. Beautiful scenery and river access make it a posh outdoor choice. There are no cabins for rent, so come prepared to endure the cold spells; otherwise buy a tent at the market, eat rabbit stew at the restaurant or dive into the hot showers to survive. A single adult pays 3.22€ per night.

There are two adequate *pensiones* in Pampaneira, **Ruta del Mulhacén** *(Plaza Nueva 5, ☎ 95 876 60 14)* and **Pampaneira** *(C/ José Antonio 1, ☎ 95 873 30 02)*. Prices for a double range from 20€ to 35€.

In Lanjarón there is the ☆☆ **Castillo de Alcadima** *(C/ Francisco Tárrega 3, ☎ 95 877 08 09, info@alcadima.com)* with 23 double rooms (47€) and seven triples (71€). This hotel is in the historical area known as the Hondillo Quarter. Furnishings are simple but adequate, with clean private baths, a restaurant downstairs and a Texas-sized swimming pool.

Adventures in the Alpujarras

The valleys, hills and peaks of Alpujarras make for **hiking** heaven, with trails following rivers and skirting ancient bridges, through valleys lit with blooming daffodil and the crocus flowers in blue, pink and white and common to the southern half of Spain. Trails range from overnight treks to one-hour or half-hour walks between neighboring villages. These are well marked and easily located in all of the villages. Among the most popular is a section of the **GR-7** (a stretch of a longer trail that crosses the Iberian Peninsula from Cataluña to Andalucía and comprises part of the even longer European E4 path that runs from Greece to Gibraltar). This section runs from the high village of El Puerto de la Ragua in north central Alpujarra to Lanjarón on the western flange. As the entire hike could take up to a week, most prefer to pick it up at one of the many villages in between for a shorter walk.

The **Carijuela de Mecina** is a great hike that begins in the deep gorge of the Río Trevélez near Fondales. This ancient path crosses forests and a Roman bridge in a gentle ascent to the pinnacle overlooking the mountains in the west and the villages and gorge below.

If you plan to go it alone, **Alpujarras Camping** *(Crtra. Del Puerto de la Ragua km 1, Laroles, ☎ 958 76 02 31, www.laragua.net, correo@laragua.net)* can direct you to one of the many campsites in this area. *Rutas Verdes* (green trails) are very common and denote trails for hikers of all levels.

> **TIP:** The book **Hiking Andalucía**, available in English for 6€ at most tourist shops in Andalucía, traces many of the most frequented routes with descriptions and crude sketches.

In the village of Bubión, **Andalucía A Caballo** *(Cabalgar Rutas Alternativas, Bubión, ☎ 95 876 31 35)* rents **horses** at 24€ for two hours and 9€ for each additional hour. A full day runs 60€.

FreeRideSpain *(www.freeridespain.com)* offers horseback rides and a two-hour mountain biking trip on single tracks from Lujar in Las Alpujarras all the way to the beaches of the Costa Tropical. **Ciclo Montana España** *(Cortijo 2, Mecina Fondales La Taha, ☎ 958 765 200, ciclo@arrakis.es)* leads groups up the challenging Veleta Pass (3,480 m/11,414 feet), which ultimately descends along the famous "Ice Man" trail, an old packhorse ice trade route running from the Sierra Nevada into Granada. Both companies offer one-week or longer stays starting at 250€.

For more extensive biking opportunities within the province, try **Biking Andalucía** *(Aptdo. 124, Orgiva, ☎ 958 78 43 72, www.bikingandalucia.com, david_Isaacs@hotmail.com)* which rents one-day guides for 65€ and mountain bikes for 25€. Their favored route stretches from Granada to Alhama de Granada along a river gorge that ends at a natural thermal spring perfect for soaking your tired feet.

If you already have your own equipment, **Parapente Aventura** is a helpful **paragliding** club that operates out of Las Alpujarres *(Club-Escuela Parapente Aventura, Tulipan 6, Fuengirola, ☎ 952 66 47 22, or Escuela de Parapente Abdejajis, Sevilla 2, Fuengirola, ☎ 952 48 91 80).*

Ocio Aventura Granada S.L. *(☎ 958 57 18 75, fax 958 55 31 50, www.ocioaventura.com)* offers a plethora of tailored "high adrenaline" activities ranging from biking to caving to rappelling and rafting. Adventures start at 15€.

■ Cabo de Gata

Located in the Almería province on the southeastern Mediterranean coast, Cabo de Gata is a pristine natural park with a volcanic landscape and extremely arid climate. It is a harsh, beautiful realm mixed with salt marshes and sand dunes, artificial wetlands frequented by flamingos and the last of Spain's undeveloped Mediterranean beaches. There are over 20 of these exceptional beaches in the park, some tucked between dunes with fine blonde sand, others lying at the foot of mountain cliffs with coarse volcanic pebbles; the water is clear and a luminous shade of blue.

The monk seal, once emblematic of these waters, disappeared in the 1970s, though recently a program has been initiated to reintroduce it. Less heartening, a new wave of development threatens to tarnish the rare conditions of this park. Growth is most prevalent around the former fishing villages of San Miguel de Cabo de Gato and San José. Most visitors prefer to stay in San José, which is located centrally in the park and maintains the best tourist facilities. At the natural park visitors' center is in San José on *(Calle Correos, ☎ 950 16 04 35)*, you can pick up trail maps and make arrangements for any of a number of guided excursions to observe the flora and fauna of the park.

Adventures

From San José you can access a number of **hiking and biking** trails that run inland and along the coast. The trail following the coast to the north, with an initial steep rise strewn with loose gravel and volleyball-size rocks, is not very accommodating for bikers and you'll have to carry the bikes for 10 minutes to reach the high and wide trail that runs relatively flat through mountains and cliffs along the

sea. The views are spectacular but you'll have to walk or ride a good two hours to get down to the first beach, **Playa del Esparto**.

The best beaches near San José can be reached via the route to the south along the coast. Follow the road through the whitewashed confines of San José's oldest neighborhood, which connects with the trails just outside of town. You'll pass the ruins of the ancient windmill, Molino de Genoveses, and shortly arrive at **Playa de los Genoveses**. This fine, sandy beach along a small bay has a number of larger sand dunes; it is one of the most pristine beaches on the Mediterranean coast. Farther along is the smaller **Playa del Barronal**, which is delineated by volcanic hills that have been sculpted by the sea to thrust out over the water. Past Playa de Monsul, the road that begins to rise into the mountains is closed to traffic. On foot or with a bike you can pass the gate and climb into the mountains to reach the18th-century **Torre Vigía de la Vela Blanca** watchtower. Past it is the **Faro de Cabo de Gata**, a lighthouse constructed in 1861 atop the ancient San Francisco de Paula castle. At this point, the **Mirador de las Sirenas** allows lofty views of the Mediterranean Sea.

In San José, **Deportes Medialuna** *(C/ Del Puerto, s/n, ☎ 95 038 04 62)* has six mountain bikes to rent at 8€ per half-day and 16€ for a full day. Problem is, on last inspection many of the tires were cracked and worn almost to the tubes and some of the brakes and gears didn't function. With luck, this problem will have been remedied by the time you arrive in Cabo de Gata. This shop also rents canoes and surfboards and sells fishing equipment.

To explore the inland trails, **Cortijo El Sotillo** *(Ctra San José, s/n, ☎ 95 061 11 00, fax 95 061 11 05, sotillo@a2000.es),* on the access road to San José, offers accommodations in a restored 18th-century Andalucían farmhouse and guides **horseback tours** for 10.82€ per hour. To access the restricted areas of the park, you'll have to book an SUV and guide at the tourist information center on Calle Correos. These **off-road 4x4** trips depart each morning at 9:30 am and return at 2:30 pm, run by **Grupo J. 126 S.L.** *(C/ Correos, ☎ 95 038 02 99, fax 95 061 10 55, grupoj126@laurel.es).*

A decidedly cooler option is to rent sleek motor-trikes from **Trike Safari** *(☎ 95 038 01 98, www.trike-spain.com)* and cruise the rural roads of the park. The bikes hold up to three people and cost 65€ for two hours or 105€ for four hours.

Scuba **divers** prefer the underwater landscapes off Playa de San José, Playa del Corralete and the Cala del Bergantín cove. The divemasters at **Centro de Buceo Alpha** *(Puerto de San José, ☎ 95 038 03 21, alpha@edisa.es, www.edisa.es/alpha)* can get you outfitted and down under for 36€ per dive. For an extra fee, you can dive with professional underwater photography equipment.

To stay above water, rent a dinghy at the **Bar Costa Rica** in town or make arrangements with **Ocioymar S.L.** *(☎ 95 049 76 49)* a multi-sport company located in the San José marina. Here you can take sailing lessons or a boat cruise and carve the smooth waters of the surrounding bays on waterskis. If Ocioymar's sailboats are booked, contact **Asociacion MCK**, which deploys a four-person, 24-foot sailboat from San José's marina *(☎ 625 28 59 91).*

Windsurfing is best off Playa de San Miguel de Cabo de Gata and Playa de Augua Amarga. In the village of San Miguel de Cabo de Gata, **Eolo Wind-**

surfing *(☎ 95 038 98 11)* offers classes and equipment. **Surfboards** can be rented at **Deportes Medialuna** in San José (see above).

Where to Stay

Hostal Costa Rica *(C/ Correos, s/n, ☎ 95 038 01 03, fax 95 038 00 59, www.parquenatural.com/costarica)* is on the main strand in San José, a short three-minute walk from the beach. Rooms in this white, modern building are new and simple, if a little small, with private bath, television and air conditioning. A double costs 30€.

A few blocks down the road is **Hostal Sol Bahía** *(☎ 95 038 03 07, fax 95 038 03 06)*, also of contemporary design but with rooms that are a little larger and less expensive at 20€ per night (though prices will pick-up in the high season). Request one of the rooms with balconies facing the street. All have television, private bath and air conditioning. Across the street, the Italian restaurant **Paolino** *(C/ Correos, s/n, ☎ 95 038 02 33, fax 67 972 27 28)* serves up delicious pizzas for 6€.

Camping

Los Escullos San José *(Los Escullos, ☎ 95 038 98 11, fax 95 038 98 11)* is a well-furnished campsite and outdoor activity center north on the coast from San José. To access it from the Autovía del Mediterránea, take the exit for Cabo de Gata (#467) or San José (#471). From the campsite you can rent mountain bikes, join boat and hiking trips and/or get equipped to go scuba diving at its dive shop. Adults are charged 3.93€ per night.

Near the small village of Cabo de Gata on an arid flat of land is **Camping Cabo de Gata** *(Ctra Cabo de Gata, s/n, ☎ 95 016 04 43)*. Facilities include a dive shop and beach volleyball and soccer set-ups. A parcel costing 8.10€ includes the price of one person, a car or caravan and tent. A single costs 3.61€.

The Levante

When Spaniards speak of the Levante they refer to that long and narrow strip on the eastern Mediterranean coast claimed by the autonomous regions of Valencia and small Murcia south of it. In this "land of the rising sun" the coastline, over 500 km (312 miles) of it, is a shared sight with the mountains rising in the interior. To the northwest the Iberian chain enters the region, bearing southeast toward the sea where the Turía and Mijares rivers end their journeys, while in the south the Beticos chain encroaches from Andalucía in its own march east to the coast.

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There is a sharp contrast in landscape between the north, with its sweeping, lustrous hills and valleys, and the south, where areas of Murcia are semi-desert, copper-colored and gritty. In the drier heights, almond, carob and olive trees dominate terraced slopes, but it is the thriving agricultural industry of the moist lowlands that has earned Valencia the reputation as Spain's garden. Utilizing a highly extensive and effective irrigation system of waterwheels and drainage ditches created by the Moors during their occupation from the eighth to the 13th centuries, farmers grow vast quantities of fruits and vegetables and the citrus plantations can produce nine months out of the year. To the famed Valenciano orange add the rice patties that have shaped the region's cuisine and the bustling tourist cities of the coast that have played havoc with its natural beauty but fostered one of the healthiest economies in Spain. The bulk of the region's population has gravitated to these coastal towns, leaving the interior with only pockets of tourists scavenging the popular destinations of Elche or Gudalfest.

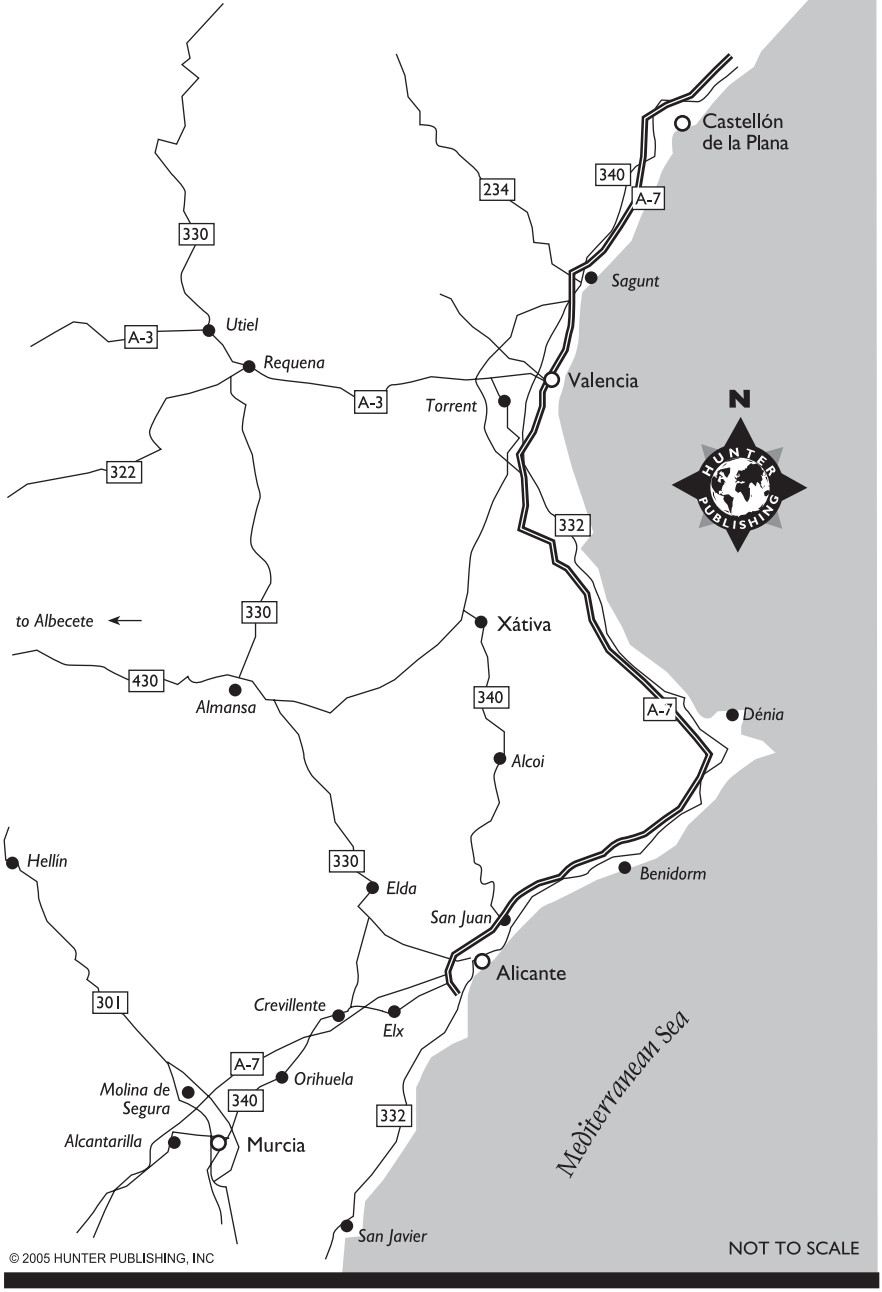
Adventure sports are, not surprisingly, water-based in the Levante, though two of the European long-distance hiking routes transect the inner lands and a slew of protected natural areas ranging from limestone crags to salt flats and lagoons add to the outdoor options.

As the Levante is a staging ground for many of Spain's most colorful and exuberant festivals, a visit here should be timed so as not to miss the flaming beauty of Valencia's Las Fallas in March or Alcoi's mock battle of the Moors and Christians in April. During its long spring, the Levant is alive with sun-loving people celebrating the coming of summer, with blooming citrus trees and with only a handful of cloudy days.

Valencia

Some 2,000,000 Valencianos make this Spain's third-largest city, with a tropical air compared to Madrid's inner-city confines and less pretension than Barcelona. You won't find a wealth of monuments in Valencia (most have been wiped away by centuries of flood and fire), but there is a scattering of worthwhile sights within the central, historical area, easily seen in a day or two. You will find plenty of the famed rice dish *paella* that originated here eons ago after the Moors had constructed the first rice paddies in the surrounding marshes.

The Levante



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■ History

The Moors ruled the city from 714 AD on as part of the Al-Andaluz caliphate regulated from Sevilla. The city itself was established by the Romans in 138 BC with the name Valentia after they had successfully run the Carthiginians out, though the city had known Celtiberians and Phoenician and Greek traders long before. The Romans established an irrigation and agricultural system, which the Moors would later perfect and thus ensure the area's fertility and productivity to the present day.

In the sixth century the Visigoths overran the city, but proved less adept at maintaining the its agricultural infrastructure and deferred to the Moors, who were briefly relieved of their Valencian property in 1094 by the Christians, led by the famed El Cid. A few years later El Cid died and not long after the Moors retook the city and held it until 1238 when an Aragonese-Catalan force under King Jaime I reconquered the city, leaving the language of Catalan behind in the process.

Valencia has often sided with the Catalans to the north, as it did during the Spanish Civil War in aligning with the leftist Republicans against Franco's forces. Valencia, in fact, was the last of the major Spanish cities to fall to the Nationalists. While Valencia doesn't share the same extreme view of cultural separatism as the Catalans, it often finds itself lingering in the shadows of its larger neighbor. One might wonder if this unbridled competition has led to the architectural Renaissance in Valencia as of late. In the 1990s, the magnificent Palau de la Music was built on the banks of the Turía River and, most recently, the sprawling Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias, a high-tech and high-concept space-age compound for scientific and entertainment activities. Some might call it an identity crisis, but the locals are quick to put down such a notion. Though the official language is Castilian Spanish, most of the people in the city speak a derivative of Catalan known as Valenciano when conversing with friends and family. Street signs, likewise, are in Valenciano, but you'll have an easier time getting around in Valencia than in Cataluña and find the locals much more helpful (and definitely easier to understand).

■ Useful Information

Tourist Offices

La Oficina de Turismo de la Comunidad de Valencia, Calle Paz 48 *(☎ 96 398 64 22, fax 996 398 64 21, touristinfo.valencia@turisme.m400.gva.es)*; Plaza del Ayuntamiento 1 *(☎ 96 351 04 17, fax 96 352 58 12, touristinfo.aytovalencia@turisme.m400.gva.es)*; Officina de Turismo de la Provincia de Valencia, Calle Poeta Querol, s/n *(☎ 96 351 49 07, fax 96 351 99 27, touristinfo.dipuvalencia@turisme.m400.gva.es)*.

> **TIP:** The cultural guide ***Que y Donde*** spells out the what and the where in Valencia each month and can be purchased at newsstands.

Important Contacts

Valencia's Port Grao: ☎ *96 393 95 00.*

Ferries to the Balearic Islands: Transmediterránea *(☎ 90 245 46 45)*; Balnearia *(☎ 90 216 01 80).*

Taxis: ☎ *96 347 52 52, 96 370 33 33.*
Local Information: ☎ *010.*
Local Police: ☎ *092.*
Red Cross: ☎ *96 367 73 75.*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: From the Plaza de Ayuntamiento, follow Avda Marqués de Sotelo south for two blocks to reach the **Estación del Nord** *(C/ Xátiva 24)*. Ten trains per day run to **Madrid** (3½ hours), **Barcelona** (3½ hours) and **Alicante** (two hours).

By Bus: The Estación Terminal d'Autobuses is on Avda Menéndez Pidal 13, north of the city center on the far side of the dry bed of the River Turía. Ten or more buses per day run to **Barcelona** (five hours), **Madrid** (4½ hours) and **Alicante** (2½ hours).

By Air: The Aeropuerto de Manises *(☎ 96 159 85 00)* is seven km (4.4 miles) west of town.

A Friend in Need

On my last visit to Valencia I had arrived the first day of Las Fallas, the outrageous springtime festival; I soon realized that I would quite likely be sleeping on the streets for the night since I hadn't bothered to make reservations. I asked an elderly man for directions to a local hostel and he assured me that no hostels would have a vacancy during the week of Las Fallas, "when everyone in Spain comes to Valencia." He offered to let me stay at his place for the night, in a pueblo outside of town. I was to meet him at the train station at 8:30 pm, once he finished his work at a local tavern.

With no other options, I did meet him, we took the train to his dimly lit, one-bedroom flat where he fed me a poor man's noodle soup typical of the south and we watched *fútbol* together as he had with his wife before she'd died. I fell asleep on his couch and awoke with sheets and a pillow that I hadn't had the night before. The man, whose name was Santiago, had already left for work, had trusted a complete stranger enough to leave him alone in his own home. I returned to the city feeling refreshed, thankful I hadn't slept on the streets and only troubled because I'd never see the friendly Valenciano again to thank him. During the festivities of Las Fallas over the next few days I met the same friendly person time and again, but with a different face and I was certain each was a member of Santiago's extended family.

■ Orientation

Other than the beaches of La Malvarrosa district with its maritime esplanade running to Las Arenas, most of the action in Valencia is focused within an egg-shaped area delineated by a bend in the dry riverbed of Turía (what is now the **Jardines de Turía**) and the streets **Guillem de Castro**, **Colón** and **Játiva** (which trace the

lines of the now-demolished city defensive wall to form a connecting U with the riverbed). The 14th-century **Torres de Serranos** in the **Plaza de los Fueros**, with octagonal towers surrounded by an empty moat, served as part of this early defensive wall and is considered to be the largest Gothic city gateway in all of Europe. The **Portal de Valldigna**, a rounded archway that originally led into the Moorish quarters, was also part of the early defense.

The **Plaza del Ayuntamiento** is the locus of action in town, roughly in the center of this area. South of it is the posh 20th-century train station, the **Estación del Norte**, and nearby the neoclassical **Plaza de Toros**, finished in 1860 and site of numerous bullfights during the festivities of Las Fallas and the Fería de Julio. North of the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, closest to the river bed, is Valencía's oldest neighborhood, the **Barrio del Carmen**, with narrow and winding streets, the Catedral, crowded plazas and plenty of eating and drinking options.

■ Sightseeing

Valencia's **Catedral** was constructed from 1262-1426 on the site of a Roman temple that had been converted into a mosque. It is a hybrid of styles. The main entranceway, the Puerta de los Hierras, is Baroque and named for its imposing iron gate. The Puerta de los Apóstoles, of Gothic design, opens out onto the Plaza de la Virgen, site of the Tribunal de las Aguas. This court was first initiated in the 10th century by the Moors to ensure that the town's water supply was appropriately apportioned to the locals. It still meets at noon on Thursdays outside the Catedral. Inside, the octagonal dome, a mix of Gothic and Mudéjar elements, casts light on the transept of this cruciform church. Spanish cathedrals were traditionally shaped in a cross, with the long nave intersecting the choir or apse at right angles. This design is prominent throughout South and Central America and in the southern United States where Spaniards once established missions to convert the native Indians. Among the treasures in this cathedral are the Holy Chalice of the Last Supper, located in the Santo Cáliz chapel, and works by Goya in the San Francisco de Borja chapel. *(Plaza de la Reina, s/n, ☎ 96 391 81 27, www.archivalencia.org, open Mon.-Sun. 7:25 am-1 pm and 4:30-8:45 pm; guided tours at 10 am, 11 am and noon cost 1.80€.)*

The Gothic **Torre de Miguelete** is the Catedral's bell tower. It is named for one of its 12 bells, which marks the hours and was first rung September 29th, 1418 to honor St. Michael's Day. The octagonal tower rises 50 m (164 feet) above the church and is a proud city landmark. *(Open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-1 pm and 4:30-7 pm, entry 1.20€ and then a climb of 207 steps up to the top for views over the city.)*

Museo Catedralicio displays 15th- and 16th-century religious art including sculptures, altarpieces, metallurgy and canvases by Juan de Juanes and

Goya. *(Open winter 10 am-1 pm; spring 10 am-1 pm and 4:30-6 pm; summer Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4:30-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-1 pm; entry 1.20€.)*

Looking like a futuristic space station that has been grounded, **La Ciudad de Las Artes y Ciencias** is billed as the "largest cultural leisure complex in Europe." Not all of its ultra-modern exhibition buildings have been completed. **L'Oceanográfic**, once completed, will be an underwater city, a labyrinth of tunnels and salons surrounded by vast aquariums of various water habitats holding over 500 marine species. *(Open winter Mon.-Fri. 10 am-6 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-8 pm, summer 10 am-12am, entry 21.56€ for adults and 14.82€ for students.)* **Museo de las Ciencias Príncipe Felipe** is an interactive science and technology museum. Themes change on a monthly basis. *(Open winter 10 am-8 pm, summer 10 am-9 pm, entry 6.01€ for adults and 4.21€ for students.)* **L'Hemisféric**, shaped like a gigantic human eye, incorporates a planetarium, an Imax theater and Laserium; spectators can enjoy three-dimensional movies or make virtual reality trips through the universe. *(Entry 6.61€ for adults, 4.81€ for students.)* Inside the long, tubular glass chamber of **L'Umbracle** is a walking path lined by gardens and the complex's underground parking garage. The **Palacio de las Artes**, still under construction, will be a modernistic hall that hosts dance, operatic, and theatrical performances. It will serve as the headquarters of the Valencian school of cinematography, a school of scenic arts and as the Valencian music center.

(To get to La Ciudad de Las Artes y Ciencias from the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, follow the riverbed along Autovía del Saler to reach the striking metal and glass complex; bus #35 and #95 make regular stops at the site.

> **TIP:** ***La Ciutat*** pass allows access to all of the exhibition spaces and costs 25.85€ for adults and 18.18€ for students and children. The pass can be purchased by calling ☎ 902 100 031, or at the ticket offices of Servientrada, serviCam, Fnac, El Corte Inglés and any travel agencies.)

Museu de Belles Artes is among Spain's most respected fine art museums. On display is the work of Valencian artists dating to the 14th century, including Juan de Juanes, Ribalta, Espinosa, Vicente López, Sorolla and Pinazo. Artists from ouside of Valencia and Spain include El Bosco, Pinturicchio, Van Dyck, Murillo, El Greco, Goya and Velazquez, whose stunning self-portrait is on display. A sculpture exhibition contains numerous pieces by Mariano Benlliure. *(C/ San Pío V, 9, ☎ 96 360 57 93, www.cult.gva.es/mbav, open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm, free entry.)*

Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno is a leading Spanish contemporary art museum with nine galleries hosting traveling exhibitions of 20th-century avant-garde pieces. Photography, painting and other modern art complement the permanent holdings on display by the 20th-century artist Ignacio Pinazo and sculptor Julio González. *(IVAM, C/ Guillem de Castro, 118, ☎ 96 386 30 00, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm, entry 2.10€.)*

Mercado Central *(Plaza del Mercado 6, ☎ 96 382 91 01, www.mercadocentralvalencia.com, open 8:30 am-2:30 pm)* is a bright, colorful modernistic building embellished with stained glass and fanciful ceramic mosaics. Dating to the early 20th century, it is one of the largest of its kind in Europe with nearly 1,000 stalls. Atop the central dome of the market rests a parrot, the *cotorra del mercat*, a popular symbol of the market. Walk the aisles and pick from a healthy selection of fruits and meats and then cross the

street to the **Lonja de los Mercaderes**. Also known as the **Lonja de la Seda** (silk exchange), seen at right, it was built in the 15th century to handle the profitable silk and garment trade in Valencia. The massive rectangular monument is sectioned into three parts: the **Salón Columnario** (Hall of Pillars) is the largest area in the building, adorned with helicoid columns designed to symbolize twisted silk or ship ropes. A plaque high up in this hall reads, "Compatriots, you can see how virtuous is trade made with honest words, respecting the promises made to fellow men and exchanging money without unlawful interest. The merchant living this way shall overflow with wealth and will ultimately enjoy eternal life."

El Torreón is the tower above the central chapel, constructed with a beautiful spiraling, snail-shaped marble staircase. **El Consulado** (The Consulate) was a later expansion in the Renaissance style. The tribunal of commerce was held here and later, during the 18th century, it would became the center of maritime trade for the Valencia region. The transactions that first began in 14th century under the guise of the **Llonja de L'Oli** (Oil Exchange) were resumed in 1934; since then, traders and industry insiders have continued to meet during sessions held every Friday.

(Silk Exchange, Plaza del Mercado, s/n, ☎ 96 352 54 78, open Tues.-Sat. 9:15 am-2 pm and 4:30-8 pm, Sun. 9 am-1:30 pm.)

■ Festivals

Las Fallas

During four days in March Valencia is literally a city on fire. Of pagan origins, the festivities of Las Fallas in Valencia began to take their current shape in the 15th century when city carpenters cleaned out their workshops in the spring and lit great bonfires in the city in celebration of their patron Saint Joseph. With time, the rough piles were embellished to the point that they now attain monumental proportions and number over 700 in any given year. The competitors, usually artists from the local School of Arts and Crafts or School of Fine Arts, spend the entire year fabricating the elaborate papier-mâché and polyurethane *ninots* (caricatures) to be placed with fantastical background settings. These originated from the *parots*, wooden candleholders that the city carpenters once adorned with clothes or masks and lit with their own bonfires. A single *falla* can cost well over $100,000 to create; they are modeled first in clay, then in plaster and finally with cardboard or plaster over a wooden frame. The goal is a mix of attractiveness, humor, ingenuity and, ultimately,

flammability. The polished finish, vibrant colors and acute attention to detail of the *fallas* is awesome. A skilled graphic artist would have a hard time creating such lively characters with high-tech computer equipment.

The celebrations begin on March 15th, the day known to locals as *la plantá*, when the *fallas* are installed in the streets by their creators. At 2 pm in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento the first *mascletá* is set off. These insanely loud, smoky fireworks exhibitions draw huge crowds to mark the official beginning of the day's festivities and they're repeated at the same time and location each subsequent day of the *fallas*. The *mascletá* fireworks are but a precursor to the larger nighttime fireworks exhibitions held over the Turla riverbed. When the noise dies down and the crowds and smoke clear, revelers pass the afternoon wandering the streets, munching on *churros con chocolate* bought at the numerous temporary stands. At almost every turn they will encounter a different *falla*, some that debauch politics, others that celebrate culture or nothing at all except zaniness. Over 300 bands march through the streets, bullfights are held in the Plaza de Toros and floral offerings are made in the Plaza de la Virgen and the basilica of Our Lady of the Forsaken. With nightfall, fireworks displays light up the sky, reaching their crescendo on the 18th, the *nit del foc* (night of fire). At midnight on the 19th the *cremá* begins; torches are set to the beautiful monuments and flames consume the product of a year-long effort in a fiery spectacle.

The Museo Fallero occupies a former leper hospice in Benicalap, a quarter of the city known as the Ciudad Fallera. In this neighborhood work on the *fallas* carries on throughout the year. Since 1934 it has housed a collection of *ninots indultats,* the *fallas* caricatures that have been saved from burning by popular vote. There are also photography and poster exhibitions that detail the history of Las Fallas. *(C/ del Ninot 24, ☎ 96 347 65 85, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, Sat. 10 am-2 pm, entry 1.80€.)*

Buñol's Tomatina Festival

Only in Spain does a town council provide truckloads of ripe tomatoes for the locals to hurl at each other. On the last Wednesday in August in the small industrial town of Buñol, a 30-minute drive west of Valencia on the N-11, the streets become crowded with tourists and locals sporting their worst clothes and loosening up their arms for the messy tomato throwing festival that is about to ensue. It is an absurd and hilarious affair that begins between 11 am and noon, when truckloads of bright red and juicy tomatoes ready to explode are driven through the town's main square and down the Calle del Cid. Some locals have already hidden themselves inside the trucks to unleash their wrath on the waiting crowds below, while others manage to scramble inside. For the next hour or so a melée of fruit debauchery ensues and as the crowds in the street and in the trucks square off with each other and no one in particular, Spaniards can be heard shouting *viva el tomate* and *tomates, queremos tomates!* ("long live the tomato" and "tomatoes, we want tomatoes").

The exact origins of the festival are unknown and only casually debated. The point here is to have a good time and try to avoid a black eye. Some say,

though, that the event began in the mid-20th century with a local domestic dispute. Regardless, the crowds get bigger every year and the pointless festival regularly draws international attention. Once all of the tomatoes have been reduced to a soupy pulp and the people, both in the trucks and in the streets, are colored a bright shade of red, a horn is sounded signaling the end of the fight. There is no need to worry about taking a shower; once the tomato throwing has ceased, the local fire department is called in to hose down the streets, revelers and all.

Alcoy's Moors & Christians Festival

Throughout the year, the towns of the Alicante province celebrate the Christian Reconquest in curious fashion. In no place is the Moros y Cristianos spectacle quite as elaborate and entertaining as in Alcoy, located 30 minutes north of the city of Alicante on the N-340. From April 22-25, the townsfolk choose sides, either Christian or Moorish, and dress in highly adorned and colorful attire representative of the various groups on each side, some in shiny armor, others in white gowns with gem-encrusted turbans or feather topped helmets. With the local bands playing noisily in the streets, fireworks sounding and raining down a shower of ash along with the streams of bright confetti, the various groups march through town along pre-determined routes. They converge on a mock fortress constructed each year in the center of town and their play out the climax of a bloodless struggle. The ill-fated Moors, after seven centuries of rule, continue to lose year-after-year to the Christians.

■ Parks

The **Jardín Botánico** *(C/ Quart 80, ☎ 96 315 68 00, www.uv.es, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-6 pm, entry .30€)*, situated at the intersection of the Gran Vía and Turía riverbed, was inaugurated in 1802, making it the oldest and – with its bounteous collection of palms, shrubs and trees – one of the largest botanical gardens in Europe. Nearby, the smaller Jardines del Turía occupy the dry riverbed of the Turía River, which was diverted in the 1950s after a massive flood. A network of foot and bicycle paths winds through its gardens and flower beds, and a number of ancient bridges cross above it. These include the 16th-century Serranos, obvious for its buttresses, and the San José, with its pointed arches. The Real Bridge has two temples housing statues of the Saints Vicente Mártit and Vicente Ferrer; and the Puente del Mar long served as the route from the city to the port and sea.

On the east bank near the park is **Palau de la Música** *(Paseo de la Alameda 30, ☎ 96 337 50 20, www.palaudevalencia.com)*, a beautiful contemporary edifice hosting regular musical concerts and, farther along, in the direction of the beach, the cultural and entertainment center there is La Ciudad de Los Artes y Ciencias.

Also in the dry riverbed is the **Parque Gulliver** *(Antiguo Cauce del Río Turía, tramo XII, ☎ 96 337 02 04, open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm, July-Aug 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm)*, a prime attraction for young people. In the middle of this entertainment park, a huge figure of Gulliver rests on its back and serves as a playground with climbing areas, slides and a large-scale model of the city. Around it is a mini-golf course, a skateboarding park and a giant chessboard.

The vibrant **Jardines del Real-Viveros** *(C/ San Pío V, s/n, ☎ 96 362 35 12, open 8 am-sundown)* is packed with locals during the traditional Sunday *paseos* who refer to it as *Los Viveros* (the nursery). It encompasses a wild but

harmonious assortment of geometrical flowerbeds looking like shards of colored broken glass, with tall palm trees, sculpted hedges and shrubs shaped into an array of dizzying designs and miniature mazes.

The city zoo, the **Jardín Zoológico**, is set within the above park. *(Viveros Municipales Pío V, s/n, ☎ 96 360 08 22, www.zoovalencia.com, open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-6 pm, entry 4.20€ for adults, 2€ for children and 1.50€ for groups or students.)*

El Parque Natural de La Albufera is the largest freshwater lake in Spain with over 7,000 acres, though the water rarely reaches a depth greater than eight feet and in most places comes up only to an average man's waste. Its name comes from the Moors, who referred to it as "the sun's mirror" and were the first to plant rice patties along its shallow, marshy rim. In the ensuing decades, more and more farmers encroached on the area, reducing its navigable expanses to a tenth of its size during Roman times. More recently, a Ford manufacturing plant has been opened near the lake and a cluster of neighborhoods developed, the filtering effect of the vegetation and its steady, controlled drainage into the sea has allowed the water to remain relatively pure, though the park has recently earned a "risked" status by the Spanish environmental protection agency.

The concern centers as much on the habitat as on what it attracts, birds. Some 250 species utilize this precious wetland 15 km (nine miles) south of Valencia. Ninety species are regular breeders in the park, and you'll see plenty of ducks of the shoveler and teal variety, as well as wintering herons, egrets and sandpiper. The water of Albufera is fed by the Río Turía and the Acequia de Rey and separated from the sea by a sandbank held in place by Aleppo pines containing the beaches of Saler and Devesa. The main lagoon is called the Lluent. From it canals branch off in every which way through the surrounding marshlands.

La Isla de Palmar is in the middle of the Albufera, a town founded in the 13th century around the freshwater fishing trade. The locals harvest the waters for shellfish, snails and eels, the main ingredient in the common local dish *all i pebre*. The organization of fishermen in the village El Palmar is charged with regulating the waters' use. The stringent guidelines for acquiring a fishing license (*redolí*) make it virtually impossible for a foreigner to drop a lure in the water legally: you must have been born in Palmar or be the son of a local fisherman, married and over the age of 22. You can still enjoy the bounties of the water in the many thatched restaurants around Albufera. To explore the watery expanses, boats can be rented in the village of El Palmar or at the northernmost of the lagoon's three locks, on the El Saler road. The park information center is also in El Palmar. To make arrangements beforehand for a guided boat tours of the park, call ☎ 96 373 72 41.

■ Beaches

To reach **Malvarrosa**, the closest beach to the city, follow the dry riverbed east in the direction of the coast to the Estación de Pont de Fusta, across from the Serrano towers. Valencia's former train station is now a hub for the city's tram line, which from here runs to the beach, Malvarrosa, and the new seafront promenade. The promenade stretches to the beaches of Las Arenas, once a gathering point for high-class

Valencianos attracted to its spa, now a busy area full of seafront bars and restaurants.

The beaches of the **Dehesa del Salér**, a 10 km (6.2 mile) expanse south of Valencia, are shaped by sand dunes held in place by Mediterranean pine forests. There are eight beaches in this area, less developed and more secluded. This strand separates the Mediterranean from the **Parque Natural de Albufera**, a freshwater lagoon surrounded by rice paddies on the delta of the Turía and Júcar rivers. This recreational area is an important resting point for birds in transit to and from North Africa and Northern Europe. The locals in the area have created a series of canals on the edges of this lagoon which they can navigate with canoes to tend their rice paddies, hunt birds and fish. To tour the lake, fishing boats can be rented in the adjoining village of El Palmar. Hiking and biking trails are prevalent around the lagoon.

■ Nightlife

It's time for *La Movida*, the nightlife scene, and the locals head to **El Carme**, the oldest neighborhood in Valencia and the rowdiest hours after the sun has fallen. Here is a mix of teenagers and exhibitionists sipping and tripping in the plazas (Plaza Carmen for the latter), and a polished set lounging in dim, leather and metal bars. **Calle Caballeros** is the longest and busiest street, with **Calle Alto** branching off from it, offering a less affluent set of bars.

A block south of Calle Caballeros is the **Plaza Negrito**, with a number of trendy but somehow tough local bars wrapped around it. **Black Cat** is dark and cool and not as expensive as the next door restaurant and bar, **Bodeguilla del Carral**.

On the main drag you'll come across an assortment of over-priced concept bars, such as **Fox Congo** *(C/ Caballeros 37)*, with beautiful, hammered metal walls and a forest atmosphere; it is posh and pricey. Next door is **Johnny Maracas** *(C/ Caballeros 39)*, another designer club full of bamboo shoots and stiff cocktails that drain the wallets. **La Lola** *(C/ Subida del Toledano 8)* serves up adept cuisine at affordable prices. Near the Catedral in the Barrio del Carmen, this new restaurant is run by a Basque chef during dinner and by a refined club crowd at night, once the kitchen has closed and "Le Club" has opened up for the night. Food includes traditional Spanish dishes as *rabo de toro* (bull's tail), *caracoles* (escargot), duck, cod and numerous rice dishes. The *menu del día* costs 12€ during the day and 27€ at night. A 50% discount is offered to diners who want to step upstairs for the spinning sessions.

For the late, late night show, stumble to **Disco Penelope** in town or take the *Trensnochador* (party train) to **Disco Bananas**, 10 km (6.2 miles) outside of town. The free train picks up at the Estación del Norte at 1:15, runs to the Estación El Romaní near the disco, then returns to the city at 6:15. The cover is 15€. Don't miss the train or you'll have to flag a cab.

■ Where to Stay

There are plenty of places to stay in Valencia but all of them will be full during the festivities of Las Fallas from March 15-19. The ☆☆☆☆ **Astoria Palace** *(Plaza Rodrigo Botet 5, ☎ 96 352 67 37, fax 96 398 10 10, info@hotel-astoria-palace.com, d 216€)* is fully

outfitted in a modern building in the city center, near the Plaza del Ayuntamiento. Traditional Victorian furniture is combined with rich coloring and fabrics designed for a regal appeal. A terrace offers nice views of the city and a business center inside is loaded with computers and other technological gadgets aiming to satisfy executive types, who have an entire floor reserved for them.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

☆☆☆☆ **Husa Reina Victoria** *(C/ Barcas 4, ☎ 96 352 04 87, fax 96 352 27 21, hreinavictoriavalencia@husa.es, d 95€-125€)* got the facelift it deserved in the late '80s. Since the 1920s, this hotel in the city center has been the classic place to stay, with visitors including King Alfonso XIII and his queen along with many of the most famous contemporary Spanish artists, such as Picasso, the poet García Lorca and the playwright Manuel de Falla. Rooms are spacious and retain a classical feel, though the modern touches go far in making the stay feel as it should – grand.

The **Parador de el Saler** *(Avda de los Pinares 151, ☎ 96 161 11 86, fax 96 162 70 16, elsaler@parador.es, d 125€)* is located in the natural park of La Albufera a few kilometers south of the city center. The setting is immaculate, with sand dunes separating the sea from the freshwater lagoon of Albufera. It is a lavish, airy experience, with large rooms either looking out over the sea or the golf course. During *fútbol* season, you can watch the Valencia C.F. team practice just outside or take advantage of the surrounding 18-hole golf course.

Budget

A block off Plaza del Ayuntamiento in the busy pedestrian zone is **Hostal Jero** *(C/ Convento Santa Clara 3, ☎ 96 351 91 86, d 50€)*, with gruff but friendly Señor Jeronimo presiding over this refurbished 20-room accommodation above a local bar in a touristy area. All of the rooms are spotless, with private baths. This may be the only hostel in Valencia that is canine-friendly.

Nearby is the **Hostal Granero** *(C/ Martínez Cubells 4, ☎ 96 351 25 48)* with less pricey rooms that haven't been recently refurbished. A double costs 28€.

Hostal Alicante *(C/ Ribera 8, ☎ 96 351 22 96, fax 96 351 22 96)* sits on a corner in the Casco Viejo, near many daytime cultural sites and nighttime venues. It has 16 simple doubles (35€) and singles (27€) with bath.

To stay near the beach, consider **Hostal La Barraca** *(Avda Neptuno 36, ☎ 96 371 62 00)* in the Malvarrosa district. If possible, request *un habitacíon exterior* with views of the Mediterranean. A single costs 34€ and a double 43€.

Alberg Juvenil Ciutat de Valencia *(Carrer Balmes 17, ☎ 96 392 51 00, fax 96 315 32 42, www.alberguedevalencia.com)* is communal living at its best. As with all youth hostels, rooms are bunk and under 10€, bathrooms are shared and kitchens are open to everyone, though your food will disappear if left in the public refrigerator. There is an enjoyable open-air patio upstairs with picnic tables for socializing.

■ What to Eat & Where

The region of Valencia is well known throughout the hungry world as the birthplace of *paella*, a slow, arduous creation combining rice with saffron, green and butter beans and seafood (or poultry, beef or vegetables) that is then baked to a golden yellow in its traditional round, metal platter with two handles. *Paella*, though, is only the most popular of hundreds of variations on the rice staple, including *arrós al forn*, a spongy, oven-baked rice dish and *arrós amb costra*, which incorporates an omelet crust. The second most common dish is *fideuá*, prepared and cooked like *paella* but with noodles instead of rice, in a fish stock. It may be yellow in color with seafood or black when cooked with squid and cuttlefish ink. Those who are into culinary matters make a distinction between such dry rice variations as *paella* and that of the *caldosos* (rice stews) cooked in various metal and earthenware casseroles and popular throughout the region.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

With its numerous rice paddies, Valencia has been called a Little China, though with a lot more color in its cuisine. The surrounding irrigated farmland known as the *huerta* boosts the region's reputation as a leading producer of fruits and vegetables. But let's not forget the delicious junk food of Valencia, the *patatas bravas* – fried strips of potatoes doused in a white cream and a spicy red sauce.

You can find *paella* good and bad in town but, for the atmosphere and dependability, trot down to the beach areas of Playa de la Malvarosa and the Paseo de Neptuno off Playa de Las Arenas. **La Herradura** *($-$$, Paseo Marítimo 2, ☎ 96 371 59 81)* looks out over the Mediterranean and serves traditional Valenciano *paellas*. Normally you should expect to pay between 9€ and 12€ for a tradtional helping of *paella*, one that doesn't include fancier ingredients such as rabbit or quail. The seafood dishes, those without rice, are also noteworthy at La Herradura. And there is no *menu del día*, which typically indicates that a restaurant is better than average, or at least aspires to be. **La Pepica** *($, Avda Neptuno 6, ☎ 96 371 03 66)* is something of a Valencian institution, serving more of the same, which is not a bad thing. *Paella* here is cheap at 7€. Americans are always curious to know where Hemingway ate. In Madrid some establishments put signs outside their entrances declaring, "Hemingway did not eat here!" just to set the record straight. Apparently, Hemingway, or perhaps a lookalike, ate at La Pepica. Both La Herradura and La Pepica are casual, with white (pink for the latter) tablecloths and traditional, apron-clad waiters who expect only that you request the check when you are ready at the end of a meal and leave a 10% tip. Problem is, most tourists mistake the IVA charge at the bottom of the check as an included tip, which it is not. IVA is a government tax.

Another place, **L'Estimat** *($$-$$$, Avda Neptuno 16, ☎ 96 371 10 18)* is a step up on the quality scale but in the same neighborhood. The place is huge and still there is always a line stretching out the door. Try for the first seating around 8 pm or for the later seating at 10 pm, and sample the rice and seafood dishes, of course. Prices range from 20-30€ per person.

Restaurante La Marcelina *($$, Paseo de Neptuno 8, ☎ 96 371 20 25)* has been serving a variety of rice dishes on the seafront since 1888. Prices are comparable to the more contemporary L'Estimat. If you don't mind fried foods, the *chipirones* are tender seafood bits, properly here served with a dry, crispy batter. As with the shellfish in the *paella*, don't be afraid to pick them up by hand.

In the city center, **A La Lluna** *(C/ Sant Ramon 23, ☎ 96 392 21 46)* serves affordable vegetarian cuisine with a *menu del día* under 10€, while **Restaurante Albacar** *(C/ Sorni 35, ☎ 96 395 10 05)* recreates Valenciano fare for a hefty price in a top-notch atmosphere. Make reservations for this fancy outing, dress for success and for starters try the lentil seafood cocktail with octopus and pigs' feet, then move on to the *salmonete con vinagreta de erizos* (red mullet in a sea urchin vinegar), both house specialties.

Excursions in the Levante

■ Sagunto (Sagunt)

With crisp views of the irrigated Valencian farmlands, known as *huertas*, Sagunt is a town notable for playing a crucial role in Spanish history and with more than one interesting archeological site to show for it. As early as the fifth century BC, Iberians settled and fortified the hill overlooking the town, atop which is perched a ruined castle. In 219 BC Hannibal, commander of the Carthaginian Empire, laid siege to the town – which at the time was allied with Rome – for a period of eight months. Food supplies were cut and the noble townsfolk chose to die of starvation rather than surrender their home. All of the town's inhabitants are said to have died, the last of which allegedly threw themselves atop massive bonfires in the penultimate days of the siege. The event spawned the Second Punic War, a devastating mess for the Carthiginians and a turning point for the victorious Romans, who would thereafter control the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. Saguntum, as it was then called by the Romans, came to serve as an important outpost of Hispania located on the heavily traveled Roman route, the Vía Augusta, which can still be seen today.

The first-century AD **Teatro Romano** *(☎ 96 266 55 91, free admission)*, built into a hillside with great natural acoustics and declared a national monument in 1896, is today a controversial site. It was recently restored using modern materials and now serves as a venue for concerts, plays and the town's annual theater festival, *Sagunt a Escena*.

The ruined **Castle** *(☎ 96 266 55 81, free admission)*, site of the earliest Iberian town, stretches for almost a kilometer atop a serrated hill overlooking modern Sagunto. It occupies seven distinct fortified areas, each proof of a different period and culture that occupied Sagunto, from the Iberians to the Carthaginians, Romans, Moors and Christians.

In town, take a stroll through **La Judería** (Jewish Quarter), a quiet labyrinth of cool whitewashed houses, arches and narrow alleys and stroll around

the other Roman ruins in town, including the **Temple of Diana**, from the fifth-sixth century BC, and the gateway to the third-century BC Roman Circus, long since vanished.

■ Morella

In the upland region of Els Ports and Maestrat, straddling the autonomous communities of Valencia and Aragón, the fortified town of Morella seems untouched, occupying a lonely rise with beautiful 360-degree views of the surrounding landscape. This zone is wealthy in its naturalism, with forests, hills and valleys, steep crags and harrowing ravines. The whole place maintains a sense of its medieval self, with small mountain villages and even smaller churches and isolated hermitages.

Morella is the capital of this semi-region of the Levante, one of the oldest of Spain's towns, with perfectly square houses separated by ancient, narrow alleys and mounted on a steep series of slopes beneath a lofty, ruined Castillo (castle) that shows traces of Iberian, Roman and Moorish influence. A pebbly looking medieval wall, with 14 towers, remains surprisingly intact, encircling the entire town and allowing entrance to it through six gates. A number of fledgling museums are located within the towers of the wall. The **Museo Temps d'Imatge** in the Torre Beneito displays photographs of Morella dating to the 19th century *(☎ 96 417 30 32)*. The **Museo Temps de Dinosaures** in the Torres de Sant Miquel houses various dinosaur fossils unearthed around Morella *(☎ 96 417 30 32)*. And the **Museo Temps d'Historia** in the Torre Nevera is devoted to the history of the city and its various inhabitants, from prehistory to the present *(☎ 96 417 30 32)*. Monuments include the Gothic 13th-century **Convento de San Francisco** and the compact, elaborately detailed 14th-century **Basílica de Santa María de Morrella**, which houses the Museum of the Archpriest.

■ The Costa Blanca

The "White Coast" is not as ruined as the Costa del Sol to the south, but almost, and not as cool as the Costa Brava to the north, but almost. This 212-km (131-mile) swath of the Mediterranean runs along the southern Valencian province of Alicante. It has a characteristic geographical diversity of sandy beaches and by limestone cliffs interrupted by dunes and marshes, rocky coves and inlets. The tourist boom of the 1960s and '70s all but raped and pillaged this coast so that now there is little to show of its beauty that is not hidden away by tasteless high-rises and bland summer neighborhoods.

To the north, the towns of **Jávea**, which is now experiencing the type of growth the rest of the coast already has, and the artists' enclave of **Altea** preserve their small and charming old neighborhoods. Of the former, its Arenal Beach is known as the "dawn of Spain" because it is here that the rising sun first lights the country. Altea is a former fishing village and still feels the part, with whitewashed homes topped by blue ceramic tiled domes glistening, soothing in the sun.

Benidorm

But then there is Benidorm, the reigning capital of all-inclusive holiday vacation packages on the Mediterranean coast. If it weren't for the city's overwhelming popularity with an aging set of British and Germans (over 300,000 each season), it would not even warrant mention. In fact, it still doesn't. To

enjoy the least affected of the Costa Brava's beaches, the choice could be either Torrevieja or the sand dunes of Gaurdamar. Nonetheless, Benidorm has the most extensive possibilities for water tourism, from sea kayaking to jet skiing, sailing and glass-bottom boat tours. **Marco Polo Expediciones** *(Avda de Europa 5, ☎ 965 86 33 99, fax 96 683 02 47, www.marcopolo-exp.es)*, located in Benidorm, is the undisputed heavyweight of active tourism companies in the Levante. For town cruises, MP rents bikes at 2.40€ per hour and quadcycles for 4.21€ per hour. The bulk of their business is based around 4x4 safaris, which they make in the surrounding mountains of Aitana. The daylong trip, including lunch, costs 60€. Be forewarned, the all-terrain vehicles are Suzuki Sidekicks, but with groups piled into four or five cars, it makes for a fun, conversational and picturesque trip through the sandy peaks with high views of the ocean and meandering rivers. They also arrange four-wheeler off-road trips and charter a 10-person sailboat for the day or longer periods.

Mundo Submarino *(☎ 96 585 00 52)* tours in a glass-bottom boat, past its island, then on to the coastal town of Calpe in the north before returning. Boats depart El Puerto de Benidorm at 11 am and return at 3 pm. It's an hour there, with some time to kill, and an hour back. Adults cost 14€ and children 10€.

Denia

The Costa Blanca begins in the north with the town of Denia, an early Roman city dedicated to the goddess Diana. It sits atop the Montgó mountain range, and is crowned by a Moorish castle. The water in this area is generally placid, washing its beaches that start with fine sand in the north before giving way to stone beaches and cliff faces to the south.

A short drive south of Denia is the fishing port of **Calpe**, where the limestone rock **Penyal d'Ifach** rises over 322 m (1,056 feet) from the sea, a park *(☎ 96 597 20 15)* connected to the town by a narrow isthmus. This natural park was referred to by the Phoenicians as the rock of Ifach, or northern rock, to distinguish it from the rock of Gibraltar, of similar appearance on the southern coast. It is an important nesting ground for sea birds and site of a nature school that studies the endemic cliff plants, junipers and palms. A zig-zagging trail can be climbed to admire the impressive views of the coast from on high.

Alicante

Alicante, the capital of the so-named province and second-largest city in the Valencia region, is a seaside port town dating to the fourth century BC when the Iberians founded the city of Tossal de Manises. In the eighth century the Moors took control and built their fortress, **El Castillo de Santa Bárbara**, on the summit of Mount Benacantil overlooking the city. Rebuilt during the reign of Felipe II, it consists of several terraced levels corresponding to the contours of the rise. At the top are the remains of the medieval castle and prime views over the

city, while below are the walls and towers of la Torreta. There is an interesting open-air display of twisted dark sculptures within the castle, the works of a handful of prominent Spanish artists such as Dalí, Serrano and Macho *(the Capa Collection is open summers 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm; winters 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm; closed Sun. afternoon and all day Mon.)*. You can reach the castle via a lift that departs from the Postiguet beach. *(The castle is open summer 10 am-8 pm and winter 9 am-7 pm.)*

Action in town centers on the **Explenada de España**, a waterfront promenade lined with palm trees that separates the port and beach of El Postiguet from the town. The oldest quarter of the city, known simply as the Barrio, is gray with pockets of colorful architecture and winding, narrow streets at the foot of Benacantil hill. Within, the Plaza del Ayuntamiento is crowded with revelers on weekend nights. On the bottom step leading up to the 18th-century town hall is an engraved disc, at a height of 3.4 m (11 feet) above sea level, marking the point from which all altitudes in Spain are measured. This point was chosen because the tide rarely fluctuates in Alicante.

The 17th-century Renaissance **Catedral de San Nicolás** was designed by students of renowned Spanish architect Juan de Herrera in an unadorned style. It is an old sight, but far from spectacular. Next to the Iglesia de Santa Maria, a Gothic construct raised on the site of an Arab mosque in the 14th century, is the **Casa de La Asegurada**, a former granary that now houses a valuable private collection of 20th-century artwork. Contributors include Eusebio Sempere, who owns the collection, as well as Picasso, Dalí, Chillida and Miró *(open summers 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm, winters 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm; closed Mon. and Sun. afternoon; free admission)*.

■ Elche (Elx)

A shady green date palm grove with over 200,000 trees surrounds the town of Elche, covering an area of over 1,000 acres and making it a paradise for park lovers. The Moors were responsible for introducing the date to the Iberian Peninsula; it has been reported that as many as a million of the trees once grew in the area. Today you can visit sections of the grove in the Parque Municipal and in the garden known as the **Huerta del Cura**, but most visitors come for a different reason.

The city of Elche is the heir to the early Iberian settlement known as **L'Alcudia**, three km (1.9 miles) to the south. The site was later occupied and embellished by the Romans before it was altogether abandoned by the Moors, who established their culture in nearby Elche. L'Alcudia would acquire a fresh significance in August of 1897, when the legendary sculpture of the Dama de Elche was unearthed on a farm over the ruins of the Roman site. For over a century since its discovery, the sculpture has continued to arouse curiosity and speculation. No one knows for certain who created the bust of this noble lady wearing an elaborate, whirling headdress with heavy brooches dangling from three necklaces. Most scholars have concluded that it is a rare and precious example of early Iberian art, carved most likely around the time of the birth of Christ. The actual bust is now in the National Archeological Museum in Madrid, though there is no shortage of replicas throughout the town of Elche and the archeological site nearby. To reach the site and explore the small but impressive **Museo Arqueológico** *(☎ 96 545 96 67, open Tues.-Sat. and Sun. mornings)* which displays relics taken from the site, follow the Dolores road south from Elche for two km (1.2 miles).

If you are in Elche in mid-August, don't miss the medieval mystery play **Misteri d'Elx** held in the 17th-century Baroque Basilica de Santa Maria. The Misteri d'Elx, which dramatizes the assumption of the Virgin Mary, was the only choral religious play allowed after the Council of Trent's ban on such exhibitions in the 17th century. The highlight of the play occurs as an angel descends and announces the sleep and assumption of Mary, when a pomegranate opens to shape a brightly colored palm tree that shelters the divine messenger.

Murcia

The capital of one of Spain's smallest autonomous communities, in the extreme southeast of Spain, Murcia is the kind of city where most visitors spend a day or so, then move on. The Moors founded this university town on the banks of the Segura River in 825 AD over the remains of a Roman outpost. The valley in which Murcia is perched is fertile compared to the arid habitat throughout the region, but still dry and extremely hot for much of the year.

If you have an evening to spare, passing through from the Costa del Sol or Granada to Valencia, Murcia can keep you entertained. Concentrate on the historical area running from the Puente Viejo de los Peligros bridge over the Río Segura up to the Plaza La Fuensanta by way of the central thoroughfare Gran Vía Escultor Francisco Salzillo. This street is happening and packed, so it's best to get out on foot and hoof it.

The **Catedral** is a block west of the Plaza La Fuensanta, abutting the Jardín El Salitre. Its first stone was laid in 1388, but the structure took four centuries to complete, in a medley of architectural styles. There are 23 chapels inside, some in the traditional Renaissance style, others in the Gothic. The 16th-century Renaissance tower replaced the minaret of the Moorish mosque that once occupied the spot. The western façade of the Catedral is the most stunning, carved of stone in the Baroque style during the 18th century by the sculptor Jaime Bort. It appears almost like a cross-section of a church's transept, with a half-dome at the top that reveals the Virgin, Ionic pillars representing the choir and an elaborate iron grate where the altar would be.

The Moorish **Calle Traperia**, to the east of Gran Vía, is the central pedestrian way running north/south through the main commercial zone of Murcia. Just off it is the sumptuous 19th-century **Casino** *(C/ de la Trapería 22)*, Murcia's most popular entertainment site and a classic place to relax *(non-members are allowed inside from 10 am-9 pm, after which you will have to pay an entry fee)*. This casino is reminiscent of old Spain, when casinos were built in each city for the exclusive use of men. Most are disappearing, much like our own drive-in movie theaters. But this one retains its majestic feel (check out the elaborate Victorian ballroom with its immense crystal chandeliers and the Grecian-styled patio) as well as its argumentative, cigar-smoking clientele.

■ Lorca

This town is so dry and cracked you want to feel sorry for it. Old men stand atop the bridge and look down at a dry riverbed, occasionally spitting over the railing just to spite the staunch land. The setting is rugged and beautiful. An ancient stone milestone, now affixed to the Casa de Los Ponce de León in San Vicente square, bears an inscription likely dating the town to the ancient Roman city of Dioclecianus.

Lorca, known as the city of a hundred coats of arms, was the capital of a rough and tumble borderland during the battles between Moors and the Visigoths, who held the city and the line of the frontier to the north, and later the Christians and the Moors, who held the city and the line of the frontier to the south. Throughout this area you'll see plenty of defensive watchtowers, crumbling walls and hollowed out castles, all of which blend into the red, orange and yellow landscape like the natural spires, mesas and crags around them.

The defensive **castle** overlooking the city, to which the Moorish inhabitants of Lorca retreated during the final stages of the Christian Reconquest, was built during the 13th century. Were it not for the bold Alphonsine Tower, added later during the Christian reign of Alfonso X after the city had been retaken in 1243, the remaining compound would be a pitiful heap, little more than a foundation with a few traces of turrets and most of the crenels lost.

On Calle Lope Gisbert you will find a number of local crafts shops, including the **Centro de Artesanía**, selling the traditional *jarapas*, which look like colorful patchwork carpets. This street runs through the oldest area of the town.

The main **Plaza de España**, in the city center, is parked with cars and surrounded by the **Pósito y Juzgados**, a 16th-century granary, the **Palacio del Corregidor** (Mayor's Palace) and the **Colegiata de San Patricio** (St. Patrick's Collegiate Church), begun in 1533 but not completed until 1704 and one of the most ornamental of Lorca's monuments.

The **Museo Arqueológico** *(Rosa Salazar Palace, ☎ 96 840 62 67, open Tues.-Fri. 11 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sat.-Sun. 11 am-2 pm, July-Aug. 10 am-2 pm, closed Mon.),* in a former palace in the Plaza de Juan Moreno, displays treasures dating back to the Copper Age, many of which were found at a nearby burial site in the Cueva Salada (Salted Cave).

■ Cartagena

Though it's more crowded today and with a reviving tourist industry to augment its maritime and dwindling mining economy, Cartagena remains a dirty port city with seedy characters prowling the streets and smells wafting from one alley to the next that certainly don't come from a bakery. The upside is that stolid monuments, or remains of monuments, stand as a testament to Cartagena's triumphant seafaring days. Writing his *Ora Maritimo* in the fourth century AD, one of the earliest surviving documents of the Iberian Peninsula, Roman Rufo Festo tells of the city, then called Mastia, founded by the Carthaginian general Asdrúbal in 227 BC. It was a great maritime cen-

Roman marble bust of a child, Museo Arqueológico

ter during the Roman occupation from the third century BC to the second century, then fell in succession to the Vandals, Visigoths and the Moors, until the Christians reconquered the city in 1245.

A stroll through the city introduces small pictures of these past cultures, embedded in the largely Baroque and Neoclassical architecture that has prevailed since the city was largely rebuilt following its destruction during the Cantonal Revolution of 1873. Of the Carthaginian reign there is a **Punic bulwark**, what's left of it, dating to the founding of the city in 227 BC. The pieces formed part of a series of parallel walls with a gap of 18 feet between them that was likely connected by a high walkway encircling the earliest Punic city of Qart-Hadast. This discovery, made just 10 years ago, is off the rotary in Plaza Almirante Bastarreche.

The Romans left a formidable imprint with the ruins at Empuríes and a handful of singular monuments scattered throughout the country like Segovia's massive aqueduct – and on their city of Carthago-Nova, the proof of which continues to be unearthed, paved over, then unearthed again. These include a Roman road dating to the Augustian era discovered in the 1970s near Plaza Merced; the Augusteum, remains of two public buildings likely used for religious purposes as early as the first century AD; a colonnade indicating a former Roman thoroughfare at the base the hill of Molinete, which itself has been a continually productive excavation revealing parts of a tower, forum and a podium once part of a first-century temple, and the Torre Ciega, which once rose above a Roman necropolis. It is called the blind tower because it lacks windows. There is a carefully excavated Roman theater, discovered in the late '80s carved into the side of Concepción Hill, and an amphitheater, which is covered by the city's Plaza de Toros (bullring) and only partially visible in places.

The Christians borrowed stones from the amphitheater when they built their castle atop Concepción Hill during the reign of King Henry III (1390-1406). For their **Catedral de Santa María La Vieja**, which dates to the 13th century, they borrowed stones from the Roman theater. What hasn't been left out in the cold is preserved in the **Museo Arqueológico Municipal** *(C/ Ramón Cajal 45, ☎ 96 812 88 81, open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm)*, built atop the remains of a fourth-century Roman necropolis and housing archeological finds from the earliest inhabitants of the region of Murcia. Besides the Paleolithic weapons and votive vases, the Roman collection is the highpoint, with mosaics, grave stone, tools and funeral epigraphs.

Roman funerary portrait in the Museo Arqueológico

In 1728, Cartagena was named as capital of the Mediterranean Maritime Department. An arsenal was constructed in the town, defensive ramparts were improved and the city grew rapidly. Monuments dating to this era include the Neo-Classical **Muralla del Mar Campus**, a military hospital built between 1749 and 1762; the **Midshipman's School**, once a naval barracks and now office space for naval officers; and the **dockyard gate**, what's left of the de-

fensive wall reconstructed during this period of growth and since topped by a clock tower. The **Museo Arqueológico Maritimo** *(C/ Dique de Navidad, s/n, ☎ 96 812 11 66, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-3 pm)* shows artifacts of the ancient naval trade, pieces of shipwrecked boats, amphorae, coins and a collection 13 giant elephant tusks found with Phoenician inscription in a nearby wreckage.

The **Naval Museum** *(C/ Menéndez y Pelayo 8, ☎ 96 812 71 38, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-1:30 pm)* displays scale models of ships, nautical charts, the usual ropes and attire, and it has a room dedicated to Isaac Peral. Peral was responsible for building Spain's first submarine in 1884, which is on display down the Pasel Alfonso XII from the Naval Museum. As a side note, the world's first functioning submarine was constructed by the Dutch inventor Cornelius van Drebel in 1624.

Adventures in the Levante

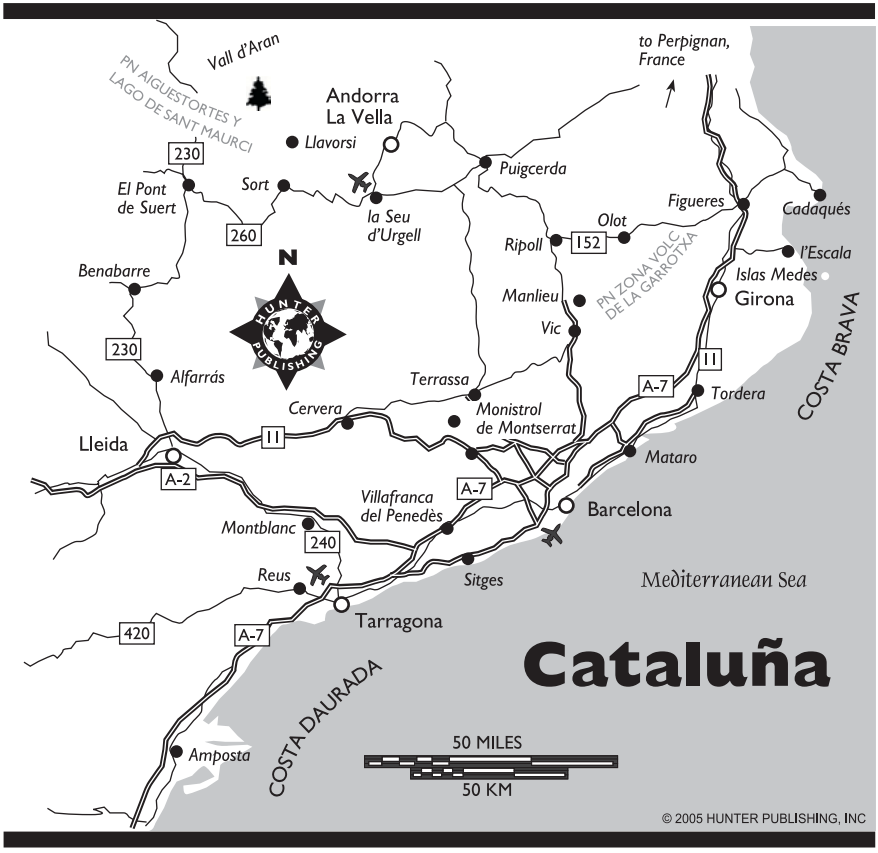
■ On Water

You'll find **dive shops** in nearly every coastal resort town, though some are limited by their locations to making dives in less appealing sites. One popular area is the **Parque Natural de Las Islas Columbretes**, an archipelago of volcanic origins 30 km (19 miles) off the coast of Castellón that has been whipped into strange shapes by the wind and sea. In the resort town of Orpesa del Mar, **Buceo Tur** *(Paseo Marítimo de la Concha 43, ☎ 96 431 01 90, www.buceotur.iespana.es)* dives the waters off these islands, which on a good day have visibility up to 90 feet. With an open-water certification, a single dive, including equipment, costs 18€. In the Alicante province, **Club de Buceo Poseidón** *(C/ Santander, s/n, edifico Silvia, ☎ 96 585 32 27, www.xpress.es/poseidon, poseidon@xpress.es)* takes divers to La Isla de Benidorm and El Arrecife La Llosa (reef), both of which are off the coast of Benidorm. A single dive ranges from 25€ to 30€. Courses are offered in FEDAS and PADI (an open-water certification will take six days and cost 300€, far too long to spend in Benidorm). **Costablanca Sub** *(C/ Santander, s/n, edificio Coblanca XX, local 10, ☎ 96 680 17 84, www.costablancasub.com)*, also operating out of Benidorm, offers night dives (16€) and occasionally explores the Isla de Tabarco, east off the coast from the resort town of Santa Pola.

Rafting in the Levante is most appealing – that is, most entertaining and at times challenging – down the Río Cabriel. For a 50-km (31-mile) expanse it defines the central, western border of Valencia with the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha, offering turbulent waters that meander through rocky natural area known for a number of golden and Bonelli's eagles, as well as the sneering eagle owl. For long jaunts it cuts through a series of high, striated gorges known collectively as the Hoces del Cabriel. **Kalahari Aventuras y Expediciones** *(C/ Del Mar 47, ☎ 96 377 44 44, www.kalahariaventuras.com)* operates out of Valencia with raft trips starting at 35€ for an afternoon on Hoces del Cabriel. The outfit also hits up the other main rafting area known as Dos Aguas, a village 30 km (18.7 miles) southwest of Valencia with access to the larger waters of the Río Jucar.

The subterranean rivers of **La Vall D'Uixó** offer a unique underground boating experience. The village of La Vall D'Uixó is 20 km (12.5 miles) southwest of Castellón on the Ctra Nacional 340. Take the exit for Nules. Known as the

Caverns of San José, this underwater river has over 2.5 km (1½ miles) of navigable waters through rocky chambers shaped by the water through the ages. It is reputedly the longest cave of its kind in Europe. The boating guides observe changing departure hours depending on the season and water level. Morning departures leave at either 10:30 or 11 am and return roughly an hour and a half later. Afternoon departures leave at 3:30 and, depending on the season, return some time between 5 pm and 6:30 pm. The headquarters for boating is located on *Calle Paraje San Jose, s/n, La Vall D'Uixó, ☎ 96 469 67 61, www.riosubterraneao.com*.



Cataluña

For a region that has long sought to distinguish itself from Castilian Spain, the vast cultural differences that are undeniably rooted in this region's topsoil may be difficult to perceive. Cataluña is not as outspoken in its nationalism as the País Vasco, nor as insecure in its motives as that region. Its people speak their own language of Catalan and actively celebrate their own culture, but the great influx of Castilian Spaniards over the last 150 years has made it unrealistic for the Catalans to ever advocate independence as they once did and as the País Vasco continues to do. Being a part of Spain apart from Spain has its benefits. Cataluña can rightfully lay claim to all the many things that make Spain so wonderful, as well as its own. It can distance itself from the poverty and maleducation that characterizes parts of its own country while actively pursuing advances in the arts and industry through its strong ties to Western Europe.

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Geographically, Cataluña is not unlike the country as a whole. The soaring Pyrenees Mountains in the north separating Spain from France yield to the Mediterranean's Costa Brava in the east. Were it not for the ungainly resorts that have diminished its natural beauty since the 1960s, this "wild coast" would be the loveliest, if not the most extreme Mediterranean coast of the peninsula. Still, its features – the dark, jagged rock outcroppings, the foreboding cliffs and the general angriness of it all – have not been completely buried in concrete, just harnessed for the ease of our enjoyment. There are the remarkable ruins of Empúries to explore, vestiges of the Greeks and the Romans who were truly the first to develop this coast, and a few of its coastal towns – Cadaques comes to mind – were never wrecked. We have the Pyrenees to thank for saving Cadaques, since to reach it one must ascend and wind around the lower reaches of these mountains for 45 minutes (on good roads) before making the descent toward this, Salvador Dalí's favored retreat. Developers tend to favor easier roads.

Higher up in the Catalan Pyrenees, where the peaks top out at over 3,000 m (9,840 feet) and waterfalls cascade down their faces, there is more to be thankful for. A series of Romanesque churches, the product of Cataluña's medieval golden age, when its counts allied with neighboring Aragón to create a seafaring kingdom unrivaled in the Mediterranean at the time, are hidden in far flung valleys, set along crystalline streams away from the package tourists and even paved roads. With snowfall, the Catalan Pyrenees offer great cross-country and downhill skiing and, when it melts, great whitewater adventures. Throughout the year one can marvel at the secluded wilderness of the Aigüestortes National Park and wonder why they ever spent so much time in Barcelona.

Barcelona is the stylistic capital of Spain, endowed with bold modernisme architecture, traditionally the seat of challenging art movements and, by and large, a truly modern, European city. To the west, the modest mountains surrounding the city, the champagne vineyards and beyond them the wild massif of holy Montserrat give way to the eastern realm of the barren plateau known as the Meseta, Cataluña's driest and most desolate expanse. As the region narrows out toward the south near its border with Valencia, the delta of the Río Ebro, Spain's longest river, fosters wetlands that attract clouds of migratory birds. Here, as throughout the coastal regions of Cataluña, the climate is strictly Mediterranean with generally mild winters and brutally humid and hot summers – a stark contrast to the dry air and snowy peaks of the Pyrenees.

In its diverse landscapes Cataluña certainly looks like Spain, even if it doesn't act like Spain. But by its own measure Cataluña adds an element of sophistication and openness that serves to complement the rest of the country. Without it, Spain would have its wine, but no champagne.

Barcelona

Barcelona is a city that immediately calls to mind great art and architecture (here one and the same), music, nightlife, walks, a great many things, as well as a great deal of misunderstanding. As a Catalan friend pointed out, "We are a complex people living in a thousand places at once." Such a maelstrom of commerce, culture and idealism is not easily correlated, often leaving visitors

with the feeling that, while they may have seen a Gaudí façade, they were never invited inside to see what was holding it up.

Besides Bilbao in the País Vasco, Barcelona was the only other Spanish city to experience and benefit from an industrial revolution in the 19th century. The resulting prosperity made it the wealthiest city in the country. With its new wealth, and the influx of workers drawn from throughout Spain to secure the newly created industrial jobs, Barcelona was able to begin reinventing itself. The city's position as a gateway to Europe, which has long exposed it to challenging foreign viewpoints, cuisines and trends, served to facilitate and shape the changes.

Next to the evocative medieval Barri Gòtic neighborhood, the grand Eixample neighborhood was constructed to handle the overcrowding brought by the industrial revolution. Soon Eixample had become a creative backdrop for the Moderniste architects just beginning to explode onto the international scene. Montjuïc was transformed from a hill with a ruined castle to a manicured beacon of hope, with museums, stadiums and its own little city.

More recently the city's languishing seafront was completely overhauled for the 1992 Olympic Games to incorporate new beaches and promenades, a port, art installations, residences and those emblematic twin skyscrapers. Over the course of the 20th century, Barcelona had become Spain's most sophisticated, refined and innovative city. As the Catalan writer Eduardo Mendoza said, "Barcelona is a city that is constantly reinventing itself."

■ History

Early Iberian and Celtic cultures planted the area around Barcelona with vines before Greek and Phoenician traders began to arrive. Around 15 BC during the reign of the Emperor Augustus, the Romans established their settlement of Barcino where the city's Barri Gòtic now stands.

The more developed ports of Taracona and Empúries overshadowed that of Barcino for the rest of the Roman occupation, which ended when the Visigoths overran the city in the fifth century and briefly established it as a capital. During the eighth century the Moors occupied the area for a brief stint until a Frankish army under Charlemagne halted their northward advances at the Pyrenees and eventually pushed them farther south, setting the stage for Cataluña's first taste of self-rule.

When the Frankish control began to fragment, much of what is modern day Cataluña was consolidated by Guifé el Pilós (Guifé the Hairy), who founded the House of Barcelona in 878 to rule this newly independent state. By the 11th century its power had expanded considerably with the establishment of a port and successful Mediterranean shipping industry under Count Ramon Berenguer III. In 1137 his successor, Ramon Berenguer IV, married Petronilla, heiress of neighboring Aragón, creating a formidable union to rival Castile in the west. While Madrid was still just a sleepy despot of bandits and itinerant farmers, Barcelona was the head of a powerful, expanding nation. Valencia and the Balearic Islands were claimed from the Moors and soon the mighty Cataluñan navy had spread its control as far as Athens. Uprisings in the many conquered lands along the way, coupled to the marriage of King Ferdinand of Aragón to Queen Isabella of Castile in 1479, which

united Spain's two kingdoms and undermined Catalan power, spelled the end of Barcelona's golden age.

Castilian dominion under the Hapsburgs led to unrest in Cataluña and a series of unsuccessful revolts, the first of which was the Reapers' War of 1640 that resulted in an eight-year occupation by the French. During the Spanish War of Succession (1702-1713) the Cataluñas, still bitter from the Reapers War, aligned with Karl of Austria rather than the French Bourbon's Felipe V, who had been willed the throne by the last Hapsburg king. Some 600 years of Catalan self-rule had officially come to an end when Felipe V was enthroned and a Castilian-French contingent laid siege to the city until it fell over a year later. The Catalan governing body, the Generalitat, was abolished and Cataluñans were forbidden from practicing their language or customs, hastening a period of decline.

Retribution came at the beginning of 19th century when Cataluña was allowed to participate in the prosperous trade of the Americas by shipping cotton from Cádiz to Italy and other Mediterranean countries. The influx of wealth insured that Barcelona would be the first Spanish city to experience an industrial revolution. New industries were created and the city grew rapidly as Spaniards from poorer regions flooded into the city, fostering an unhealthy situation marked by overcrowding and disease. To cope, the city's medieval walls were destroyed to allow for expansion and in 1869 work was begun on the Eixample, a master-planned urban extension that became the abode of Barcelona's bourgeois class but did little to ameliorate the problems confronting the poor and working class. The Eixample became the canvas of the great Modernisme architects who emerged toward the end of the 19th century and successfully capitalized on the period known as the Renaixenca, or revival.

With its prosperity ensured, the fierce Cataluñan nationalists began to assert their cause once again in hopes of creating an independent nation. All the while, conditions for factory workers were becoming increasingly inhumane. This, coupled with the attempted mobilization of Catalan soldiers to assist in an occupation of Morocco, brought about the terrible events of the Semana Trágica in 1909 when an anarchist revolt led to the destruction of almost 70 buildings and the death of over 100 workers. The ensuing popularity of workers' unions only exacerbated tensions in the workplace and, fearing that continued upheavals might lead to a concerted push for Cataluñan independence, the fiercely anti-Catalan General José Maria Primo de Rivera imposed martial law on the city from 1923 through 1930. When the General was finally ousted, Catalan nationalist leaders called for a democratic Spanish republic in which Cataluña would be an independent state. Though the Spanish republic was never realized, Cataluña declared itself autonomous nonetheless, resulting in a popular backlash at the national polls in 1933. A right-wing government was elected and Cataluña's so-called autonomy was repealed, soon after which an attempted secession was brutally put down in the streets of Barcelona by Spanish troops. The election of the Catalan-supported Leftist Popular Front fostered a short-lived autonomy in 1936, but by then Franco had begun to creep into the picture.

Cataluña's fierce nationalism set the stage for some of the bloodiest battles of the Spanish Civil War. The city was bombed for the first time in late 1938 and had fallen to the rebels a few months later. Franco came down hard on the

city for its ideals. Cataluñan leaders were beheaded or shot dead in their tracks while others were forced into exile. Use of the Catalan language or any manifestation of regional culture was explicitly banned and the rule was brutally enforced.

By the 1960s unrest was once again a daily feature in the streets of Barcelona; protests were common as the Catalan quietly began to reclaim their culture; when Franco finally died in 1975, Barcelona wasted little time in erasing his name and image from its street signs and storefronts. It was a period of exultation capped in 1978 by the establishment of the Autonomous Community of Cataluña with Barcelona as its capital. While the region is still under control of the national government with respect to currency and foreign policy, it enjoys broad powers over regional industry and trade, education, tourism, language and the many other cultural traditions that the Catalans pride themselves on. After hosting the Olympic Games in 1992, for which the city gave itself a thoroughly successful makeover, Barcelona had fully established itself as the Spanish capital of style and spectacle, even if it might never be the capital of an independent Cataluñan nation.

■ Useful Information

Tourist Offices

The crowded tourist office in Placa Catalunya is good for a city map and a few brochures, just don't expect much one-on-one time. Sign up here for the city tour bus and walking tours *(Placa Catalunya 17, down the stairs across from Corte Ingles; open daily 9 am-9 pm)*. A much more helpful tourist office is in the Palau Robert *(Passeig de Gràcia 107, 93 238 4000; metro Diagonal)*. Smaller offices are in the Placa Sant Jaume *(Ajuntament, C/ Ciutat 2, open Mon.-Fri. 9 am-8 pm, Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*, the Barcelona Airport and in the lobby of Sants railway station.

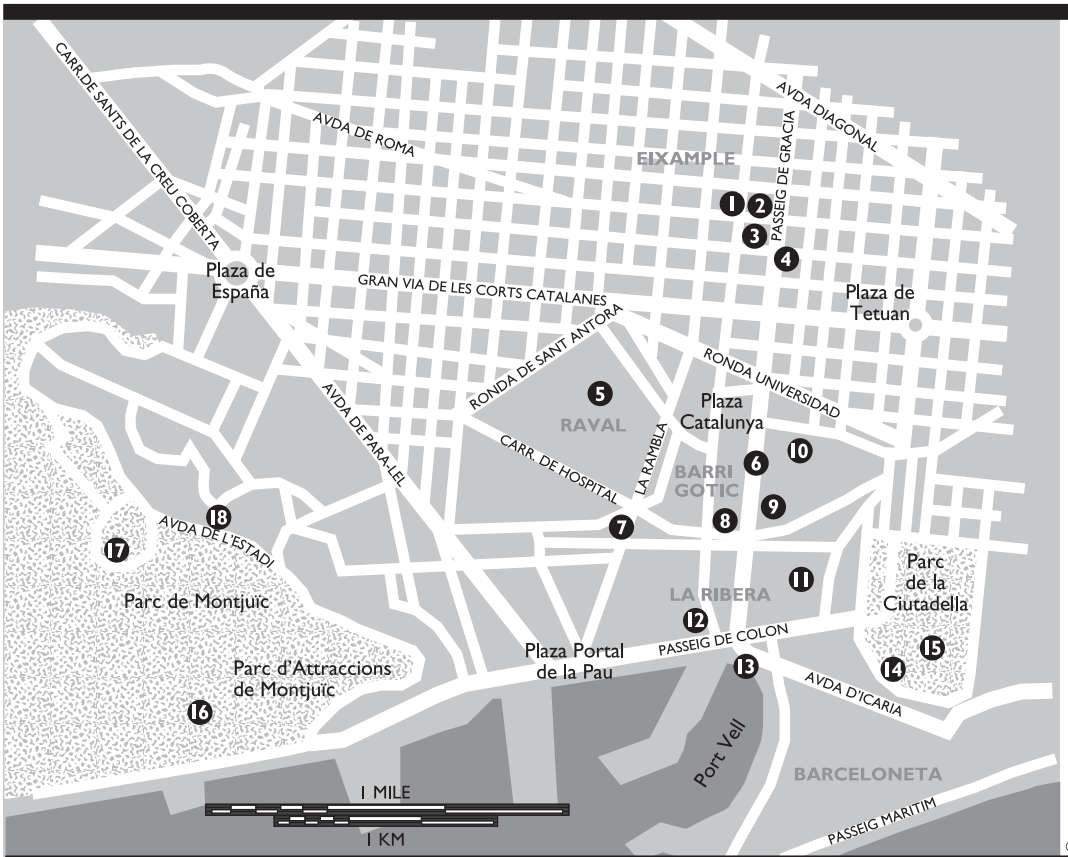
Info line: ☎ *90 630 12 82.*

Tour Options

In addition to the daily walking tours offered by the tourist office, you can work your suntan, get the lay of the land and tae in a few sights on the fly to the tune of a narrating drone by catching the double-decker **Bus Turístic**. The tour covers two routes and you can get on and off throughout the day at one of 26 stops. A one-day pass costs 15€ and can be purchased at the Sants station, the Placa de Catalunya tourism office and the Mirador de Colom.

PASSES & DEALS

The tour offices also offer the discounted **Barcelona Card**, which includes one to five days free public transport and 100 discounts to museums, entertainment and leisure attractions, shops and restaurants *(☎ 90 630 12 82)*. The **Articket**, for 15€, allows access to the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona and the Fundació Caixa Catalunya.



Barcelona

1. Fundacío Antoni Tápies
2. Casa Batiló
3. Casa Amatlier
4. Casa Lleó Morera
5. Museu d'Art Contemporàreo
6. Palau Reial, Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat
7. Gran Teatre del Liceu
8. Catedral
9. Museu Frederic Marés
10. Palau de la Música Catalana
11. Museu Picasso
12. Museu Maritim
13. L'Aquarium
14. Parc Zoologic
15. Museu d'Art Modern
16. Castell de Montjuïc
17. Estadi Olimpic
18. Fundaró Joan Miró

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Mike's Bike Tours are a fun way to see the city, meet new people and honk a horn. The tour lasts four to five hours and covers the Barri Gòtic, Sagrada Familia, Parc de la Ciutadella and the Villa Olímpico along the beach to Port Vell *(Placa George Orwell in the Barri Gòtic, ☎ 93 301 36 12; 24€)*. There are also a number of private tour guide companies in the city, including **City Guides** *(☎ 93 412 06 74)*, **BGB** *(☎ 93 268 24 22)*, **APIT** *(☎ 93 319 82 79)* and **Mediterrani** *(☎ 93 221 39 17)*. These companies offer private guided tours in most languages that last around four hours and cost upwards of 145€.

Internet

Internet cafés are everywhere. On Las Ramblas try **Navegaweb** *(Centro Comercial New Park, C/ Ramblas 88094)* or in the Barri Gòtic, **BBIGG** *(C/ Comtal 9, www.bbigg.com; walk down Portal de l'Ángel trailing away from Placa Catalunya and Corte Ingles, then make a left on C/ Comtal)*. A far cooler option is the **Librería Café Idea** *(Placa Comerca 2, M: Jaume I)* in a historical building in El Born with three floors of antiques, couches, free international newspapers, magazines and Internet portals, plus a bar.

■ Festivals

After their New Years celebrations (*Cap d'Any* in Catalan), Cataluña celebrates the **Cavalcada des Reis** with a street procession honoring the Three Wise Men. **Carnaval** (*Carnestoltes*) sees parades, fireworks and plenty of drinking but pales in excitement to that of nearby Sitges. On March 3 Gràcia celebrates its patron **Sant Medir** with lots of candy throwing and street festivities.

On April 23, the day of patron **Sant Jordi** (St. George), stalls are set up to exchange books (for men) and roses (for women). The **Festa de Sant Ponc** on May 11 honors the patron saint of herbalists and beekeepers in Raval. For the **Corpus Christi** parades of May and June giants and big-headed characters parade through the streets and a hollow egg dances atop the fountain of the Catedral. On June 23 Barcelona sees it rowdiest party of the year in celebrating **Sant Joan** (St. John) with bonfires and fireworks that go off for days leading up to the event and days afterward.

Throughout June various neighborhoods hold the **Trobada Castellera**, in which well-practiced locals form a human base, upon which others climb, forming higher and higher levels, each with fewer people on them. Finally, a small child climbs to the top, as much as 100 feet in the air, completing the human castle. Also during June the city hosts the **Sonar Festival of Music and Multimedia** and the **International Guitar Festival**. **La Festa de Gràcia** on August 15-23 should not be missed as the neighborhood adorns its streets with giant caricatures for the Assumption and parties all day and night.

On September 11th the stores shut down for the **Diada National de Catalunya**, the National day of Catalan. The festival of **La Mercè** for four days beginning on September 24th is a great celebration with live music, parades, dances, human castles and sporting competitions. From October through early December nightly jazz concerts are held at the Palau de la Musica Catalana for the **International Jazz Festival of Barcelona**.

Useful Numbers

Barcelona General Info Line/Lost and Found: ☎ *010.*
Local Police: ☎ *092.*
Medical Emergencies: ☎ *112.*
Firefighters: ☎ *080.*
Pharmaceutical Info: ☎ *93 481 00 60.*
Barcelona Port Authority: ☎ *93 306 88 00.*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Air: Barcelona's efficient international airport is 12 km (7.2 miles) south of the city *(☎ 93 289 38 38)*. Keep in mind that, for international flights, the operators follow a strict rule that all passengers must check in at least an hour before departure. Trains run every 30 minutes to and from the railway Estación de Sants, which can be reached from any part of the city by the Metro. A better option is to catch the nice blue Aerobus A1, which runs every 12 minutes beginning at 5:30 am. The bus runs a loop with stops on Placa Catalunya, Passeig Gràcia/Diputació, Avda Roma, Esació Sants, Placa Espanya, the Aeropuerta, Placa Espanya, Gran Vía/Urgell, Placa Universitat and back to Placa Catalunya. The one-way ticket can be purchased on the bus for 3.45€ *(☎ 93 298 38 38)*. If you're short for time there is always the taxi, but you'll be assessed an airport surcharge which, in most cases, pushes the fare upwards of 20€.

By Rail: Tickets can be purchased for all destinations from any of Barelona's three train stations, though departures are site-specific. The main railway station is Esació de Sants on the Metro stop of the same name *(Placa dels Països Catalans, ☎ 93 490 24 00)*. Almost all trains with Spanish destinations and some European destinations depart from this station, which is southwest of La Rambla a good 25-minute walk away. On La Rambla, walk west past Placa Catalunya and make a left on Gran Vía. Sixteen blocks later you'll make a right on C/ Tarragona from Placa Espanya to reach the station six blocks up on the left. Not surprisingly, you'll more than likely want to catch the metro or a taxi to get there.

Most European destinations depart from the **Estació de Franca** *(Avda Marquès de l'Argentera 6, ☎ 93 319 32 00),* located immediately south of the Parc de la Ciutadella near Port Vell (Metro Barceloneta). On foot from La Rambla, walk to the statue of Columbus and make a left on Passeig Colom, which leads directly to the station roughly five minutes away.

The third station is **Estació de Passeig Gràcia** *(Passeig de Gràcia, ☎ 93 488 02 36)*, though more than likely you'll never set foot inside it. For train information contact **RENFE** *(domestic trains ☎ 93 490 02 02; international trains ☎ 93 490 11 22)*. The regional train carrier is **Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat** *(☎ 93 205 15 15)*.

By Bus: The main bus station is the Estació del Nord *(C / Ali Bei 80, ☎ 93 265 65 08, metro Arc de Triomf)*, though some companies operate out of the Estació de Sants. From Placa Catalunya walk down C/ Fontanella along the right side of El Corte Inglés. Pass straight ahead through the Placa Urquinaona and veer right on Rda. St. Pere and 2½ blocks later veer left to follow C/ Alí Bei.

By Ferry: All of the ferry services to the Islas Baleares dock at the Moll de Barcelona in the Esació Marítima, the city's main port near the bottom of La Rambla and Avenida Paral-lel. The main carrier is **Transmediterránea** *(☎ 90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)*, though smaller companies like **Buquebús** *(☎ 93 443 98 20)* operate generally slower and less frequent services to the islands. Transmediterranea runs to Palma on the largest island of Mallorca (eight hours), Mahón on Menorca (nine hours) and to Ibiza (10-11 hours). High-speed ferries which lop about half the time off and cost twice as much run to Palma (four hours) and Ibiza (5½ hours).

During the winter there are fewer services and during the summer the seats go fast. In the summer, book well in advance, either on the Internet, over the phone, at the ticket office on the docks or with one of the travel agencies in the city (which charge a fee, of course). If you intend to hop from one island to the next using the ferries, definitely plan and book ahead of time as the ferries operate at specific hours that may not correlate with your vacation timeframe.

■ Getting Around

By Metro: Barcelona's subway system (the Metro) is an efficient way to zip around from site to site. The system consists of five lines (L1-L5), often referred to by the corresponding colors. A one-way pass costs 1.05€, though if you plan to use the Metro frequently it's better to purchase the T-1 10-trip ticket for 5€. The T-1 can also be used for the bus system. Each stop has a ticket and a manned information booth stocked with handy little maps so you don't have to stare at the wall all day. The Metro runs from 5 am-11 pm Mon.-Thurs., 5 am-2 am on Fri.-Sat. and 6 am-noon on Sundays.

By Bus: While slower, the bus system is easy to use and allows you to see the city along the way. Maps posted on the booths at each stop detail the routes covered and numbers above the booth denote which buses pick up and unload at that particular stop. The buses run generally from 5:30 am-11 pm. Between 10:30 pm and 4:30 am, **Nitbuses** run every 20 minutes from the Placa Catalunya to a limited number of destinations.

By Taxi: Flagging down a taxi is no problem as the yellow-jackets are everywhere. Expect an initial fee of around 1.50€ upon entering the taxi, after which the fare is gauged according to time, or in some cases, distance. There are surcharges for luggage and trips to the airport, which by law must be posted on the rear window. **Radio-taxi**: ☎ *93 205 00 00*; **Servi-Tax**: ☎ *93 330 02 00*.

■ Orientation

Upon arriving in the city, bewildered tourists are inevitably dumped in the **Placa Catalunya**, the central hub of the city's public transportation. Despite the pedestrian chaos (which only gets worse on Las Ramblas), this large square is nestled in the heart of Barcelona between the modern and historic zones, thus making it a good place to get your head screwed on straight from the outset.

Keeping it simple, two important streets depart from the square. **Passeig de Gràcia** runs west (when facing the gray hulk of the Corte Inglés department store, it is to the left) through the vast grid of **Eixample**, the newer, sleek commercial and residential zone. West of Eixample, in the shadows of **Mont**

Tibidabo is **Gràcia**, Barcelona's upper-class neighborhood. Running perpendicular to the Passeig de Gràcia through Eixample is **Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes**, the city's major north-south vehicular thoroughfare; **Avinguda Diagonal**, the last major artery in Eixample, crosses Passeig de Gràcia at a 45-degree angle from the southwest.

Returning to the Placa Catalunya, cattycornered across from the Passeig de Gràcia, **La Ramblas** runs east toward the Mediterranean, passing through the historical center of Barcelona as far as the tall monument of Christopher Columbus with the marina of Port Vell behind it. This infamous strip divides the seedier neighborhood of **Raval** on the south side from the more desirable **Barri Gòtic** opposite it. The Barri Gòtic extends northward to include the fashionable neighborhood of **El Born** in La Ribera and, just beyond it, the **Parc de la Ciudadella**.

From the promenade along Port Vell at the base of Las Ramblas, the hill of Montjuïc is visible to the south next to the industrial port with its massive freighters and steel cranes; the wires of the cable car running to the top point the way, roughly mirroring the direction of Avinguda Parl-lel connecting the port to stately **Placa de Espanya** at the intersection with Gran Vía. Following the waterline north, away from Montjuïc and around the marina, leads to the old fisherman's quarter of **Barceloneta**, which abuts the first of the city's beaches (El Born and the Parc de la Ciudadella are behind, or west of this quarter). From Barceloneta a seafront promenade parallels the beaches on the way to the **Port Olímpic** and the surrounding Villa Olímpic neighborhood. This area is unmistakable with the city's emblematic twin skyscrapers.

■ Sightseeing

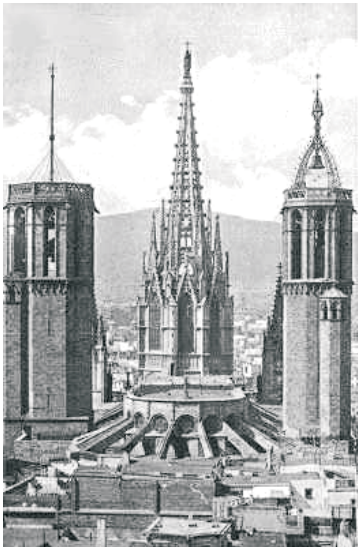
Barri Gòtic

A few steps into the city's oldest quarter and that first impression of Barcelona as a modern, avant-garde city is shattered with a crush of sensations that, save for the crowds, the pace and the storefronts, seem to have changed little in 500 years. In this Gothic labyrinth nets are still stretched beneath the upper balconies of 13th- , 14th- and 15th-century residences to catch the trash that is inevitably tossed out windows, as well as the occasional pigeon that has seen better days. Busy pedestrian streets lined with boutiques and bakeries yield to quiet, empty corners concealing trendy bars, a man sleeping there, smells that can be overpowering at times.

Other streets are spotless and elegant, a cobblestone dance past fancy antique stores and upscale *bodegas* emerging in a small plaza strewn with the stainless tables and chairs of two or three *tapas* bars. Love it or loath it, the colorful Gothic quarter is a requisite stop if the city's oldest monuments are to be seen. Among them is the cathedral, a collection of palaces, museums and excavated Roman ruins. The latter survive from the earliest days when the Romans had first created this neighborhood during the reign of Augustus (27 BC-14 AD). An ancient defensive wall, still visible in places, served to separate it from what then was nothing but empty space all around.

Catedral de la Seu

The brooding centerpiece of the Barri Gòtic, the Gothic Catedral de la Seu is a striking temple and the best example of its style in the city. Rather than



pierce the clouds or sparkle with miles of stained glass, Barcelona's cathedral is squat and compact; its façade is ornate in typical Gothic fashion, but not garishly so. The interior appears stripped, drab, and even a bit run-down compared to Spain's other great Gothic cathedrals. Before the main entrance, the steps of the Placa Nova are crowded with bantering musicians, mimes, clowns and kids chasing pigeons. You can't help but feel uplifted. You enter through the portal of the gorgeous 19th-century Neo-Gothic façade, added long after the first stone had been laid in the 13th century, into the wide single nave covered with a high vaulted ceiling. Straight ahead are the expertly carved stalls of the 15th-century *coro* (choir) with the coats of arms of the 12 knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece called to task by Emperor Carlos V. Lining the perimeter with cast gold, alabaster saint's tombs and collecting dust are 28 chapels; the Capella de Santa Llúcia is the only one to have survived from the original Romanesque cathedral.

Behind the choir, steps lead beneath the main altar to the caged sepulcher of Santa Eulàlia, whose 14th-century alabaster tomb depicts her martyrdom at the hands of the Romans in the fourth century AD. An elevator on the left allows access to the top of the tower for the price of a single-dip gelato cone.

The dim interior gives way outside to the happy cloister, complete with Gothic arcading, ponds with crotchety old geese (some of which may be as old as the church) lazing in the shade of magnolias and palms, and a fountain with a statue of the city's patron St. George slaying a dragon. If you visit Barcelona during the festivities of Corpus Christi in June, an empty egg will be hovering on top of the spouting water. Off the cloister, the **Museo de la Catedral** houses a small collection of 14th- to 18th-century paintings that have been retired from active religious duty. Chief among them is *Pietà* (1490) by Bartomolé Bermejo, a sobering depiction of Jesus lying in the arms of the mourning Virgin. *(Placa de la Seu, s/n, ☎ 93 310 25 80, open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-1 pm and 5-7 pm, entry 1€.)*

When you exit the cloister through the Porta de Santa Eulàlia, make a left to hear the prettiest voice in Barcelona. The next street up on the left, **Carrer Pietat**, which runs behind the Cathedral, is known to local musicians for its great acoustics. There, an aging brunette can often be found singing her mournful melodies; if you tip one street performer, make it her, if only because the dame has soul.

Around the Catedral

Left of the Catedral façade in the Placa de Nova the building now housing the **Museu Diocesà de Barcelona** retains part of the early Roman wall and a fourth-century tower. For a better look at the Roman wall, follow Carrer de Tapineria around the left side of this building to the **Placa de Ramon Berenguer el Gran**, where a small dirt park stands just beneath the ruins. Topping the ruins is the **Capella Reial de Santa Àgata**, the 14th-century chapel of the palace on the far side (we're getting there). In contrast to the

Cathedral Museum, the Diocese Museum next door possesses a wealth of 12th- to 20th-century religious art, including paintings, metallurgy, sculpture, ceramics and textiles. The cornerstone of the collection is the lucid altarpiece with an image of San Juan by Bernat Martorell. *(Avda de la Catedral 4, ☎ 93 315 22 13, www.arquebisbatbcn.es, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; entry 2€; metro Jaume I.)*

Around the backside of the Catedral, the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya preserves four Corinthian columns from the erstwhile **Temple Romà d'Augustí**. Just look for the millstone marking the spot and walk in if the door is open.

Placa del Rei & Palau Real Mayor

Palau Real Mayor

Relatively little seems to have changed in this small plaza since King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella greeted Columbus here upon the explorer's return from the New World, no doubt with frightened little Indians in tow. The Carrer dels Comtes de Barcelona, the pedestrian street to the left of the Catedral's front façade, runs beside the cathedral to this plaza, passing a fine complex of evocative palaces, including those of Lloctinent, Padellas and the most interesting, the grand **Palau Real Mayor**, originally a Romanesque structure of the 11th century, with later Gothic additions. It was the residence of the Counts of Barcelona. The palaces are now home to a number of top-notch museum spaces, with access in or near the Placa del Rei. The immense and immensely instructive **Museu d'Historia de la Ciutat** claims a number of the palace's former salons and allows an underground tour of Roman ruins dating to the first century BC, as well as later Visigothic constructions that have been excavated beneath the palace and cathedral next door. A detailed model of Barcelona in the 15th century shows what the city would have looked like long before Eixample and Gaudí were ever thought of.

The museum pass also includes access to the 14th-century Saló del Tinell, a grandiose banquet hall and former Royal throne room with six stone archways, said to be the spot where the King and Queen greeted Columbus; the austere Capella Reial de Santa Àgata, the former royal chapel; and to the top of the Torre del Rei Martí, a high *mirador* overlooking the city. At the time of publication, the latter was closed for renovations. *(Placa del Rei, ☎ 93 315 11 11, www.bcn.es/cultura, open Oct. 1-May 31 Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; June 1-Aug. 30 Tues.-Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm; entry 4€, free on first Sat. of each month; metro Catalunya or Jaume I.)*

Access to the **Museu Frederic Marès** is around the corner from the Placa del Rei in the Placa de Sant Iu. Before entering this eclectic museum, take a moment to appreciate the quietude of the courtyard; places like these are hard to come by in Barcelona. In the summertime an outdoor café over in the corner serves coffee and pastries and offers a shaded grouping of tables. Frederic Marès (1893-1991) was a successful Catalan sculptor who managed to amass a fascinating collection of artwork during his long lifetime. The first

three floors are devoted to peninsular sculpture from the ancient times to the present, while the top two floors consist of what the curators call the Collector's Cabinet, displaying various odds and ends (emphasis on odd) that Marès the benefactor hoarded away through the years; the "cabinet" offers an interesting slice of 19th-century life. Rooms are devoted to women's trinkets (fans, combs, jewelry), smokers (hundreds of pipes) and more. And then, of course, there is a section displaying the sculptures created by Marès the artist. *(Placa de Sant Iu 5-6, ☎ 93 310 58 00, www.museumares.bcn.es; open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 3€, free the first Sun. of each month and every Wed. afternoon; metro Jaume I.)*

On Sundays locals gather in the Placa Nova before the Catedral for the Sardana, a traditional dance in which groups hold hands in circles and prance to the music of brass and drums. The dance celebrates friendship and sharing, as shown by the piles of personal belongings heaped together in the center of the circles.

Placa de Sant Jaume

The Barri Gòtic's central plaza is as stoic as the guards stationed to watch it. Their job is to mind the Palau de la Generalitat and, across from it, the Casa de la Ciutat, though usually they spend their days yelling at taxis to get out of the way and offering lost tourists directions. The **Palau de la Generalitat** is the seat of Catalan's autonomous government, a 15th-century Gothic edifice that got a Renaissance facelift. You can walk in and admire the grand stone staircase that leads to an upstairs courtyard as well as the Capilla de Sant Jordi (Chapel of the city patron, St. George). Opposing it, the **Casa de la Ciutat** (Town Hall) dates to the 14th century, though it too has gone under the knife. Paramount in a quick visit to the town hall is the **Saló de Cent**, in which the Council of One Hundred ruled Barcelona from 1372 to 1714.

Outside there is not all that much to do in this plaza except to look around, dodge cars screaming towards La Rambla, watch the occasional post-wedding celebration, draw money from one of the many ATMs or ask the guards for directions.

Placa Reial

It didn't take long for you to find this spot, did it? Placa Reial is *the* place to meet, the place to sit and stare at Moroccans scamming tourists, at tourists waiting in lines to eat, at kids drinking cans of cheap Spanish beer around the fountain of the Three Graces and at cops busting Moroccans. While transients once marred its elegance, the 19th-century neoclassical square just off Las Ramblas has reclaimed its vibe, due in part to heavier policing, restorations and jazz music.

The palm trees offer little shade but give the place a Mediterranean air that makes it feel cleaner than it actually is; street lamps designed by Gaudí light

it up at night – with good reason. Along the ground floor arcade, restaurants serve expensive *jarras* of sugary *sangria* and corporatized *paella*; there are bars at every corner and others concealed on the second floor, accessed by buzzing unmarked doors. On Sundays a stamp market fills the square, though every day in Placa Reial plenty of other goods are for sale.

Las Ramblas

Tourists know they must walk the walk at least once. After that, most vow to stay as far away from Las Ramblas as possible, effective as it is at sucking them back into the mayhem. Yet there is no other place quite like it in this city or the world for that matter and one look never feels like enough. A walk down the tree-lined promenade leads past flower shops, rattling birdcages, starving artists, starving vagabonds, whaling buskers, craft and newsstands and street mimes that have included Che Guevera, John Wayne, the Simpsons and at least one simple-minded character who strapped cardboard to his arms and flapped like a bird, much to the passing crowd's delight.

> **DID YOU KNOW?** The name Rambla derived from the Arabic *raml*, meaning dry riverbed, a reference to the river that flowed just outside the 13th-century city wall from the Collserola mountains to the sea, before it was eventually built over and strangled.

Mention is rarely made of the many attractive façades running along both sides of the promenade – too many fast food joints and junk tourist shops outnumber them. Las Ramblas is actually a series of connected sections, each with its own name and character, running as far as the Placa del Portal de la Pau (Gate of Peace) near the towering monument to Christopher Columbus.

> **TIP:** Keep in mind that, while the shops close down around 9 pm every day, the stealthy thieves of Las Ramblas work 24-hour shifts.

Placa Catalunya

The vast square at the top of La Rambla merges the old city with the new and serves as the nerve-center of Barcelona's transportation services. Benches and a grassy knoll (which the local authorities have tried in vain to keep carousing couples off of) surround the polished central expanse with its decorative star mosaic. A few impressive Neo-Gothic edifices occupy the northern corner of the plaza, but most of the buildings surrounding the plaza are plain and modern places where one can stock up on department store goods or groceries from El Corte Inglés, electronics and books at FNAC, feel right at home in the Hard Rock Café or draw money at the bank to do something more worthwhile.

Rambla de Canaletes & dels Estudis

The uppermost section, beginning at Placa Catalunya, is known for the **Font de las Canaletes**, a fountain that, tradition has it, guarantees your return to the city after one metallic sip. The next section between C/ Santa Anna and C/ Portaferrissa is known as **Rambla dels Estudis** after the students who crowded outside its university during the middle ages. These days it is more commonly referred to as La Rambla dels Ocells (birds) for the numerous

stands of the bird market. The pigeons seem to love to torture the poor, caged parrots.

Rambla de Sant Josep

Banana trees and flower stalls color this section from C/ Portaferrissa to the Placa de la Boquería, where Miró left his mark for all to walk on with his vibrant **Mosaïc de Miró**. Midway down on the Raval side, the Modernismé stain glass entrance to the **Mercat de Sant Josep (La Boquería)** is visible. Arguably Spain's greatest open-air market, the Boqueria is lined with stall after stall offering fresh seafood, meats, vegetables, produce and confectionaries. Most vendors are more than happy to allow you to sample the goods. Bars and small grills line the perimeter. Kiosko Universal, in the corner to the right of the entrance, is a working-class café-booth with stools to sit on and choose from an assortment of meats and fresh seafood just waiting to be tossed on the grill.

In returning to Las Ramblas, you'll more than likely be offered a flyer for the **Museu de l'Eròtica**, the contents of which are easy to surmise. Kama Sutra-savvy or not, you may still be taken aback by the giant wooden penis or La Silla del Placer (the pleasure chair), which looks like a medieval torture device or perhaps a precursor to the electric chair, but with its own special buzz *(Rambla de Sant Josep 96, ☎ 93 318 98 65, www.erotica-museum.com; open 10 am-noon; entry 7€).*

Before moving on, take a moment to admire one of the more intriguing façades on Las Ramblas, the **Casa Bruno Quadros**. Designed by modernist architect Josep Vilaseca in 1885 for an erstwhile umbrella shop, the showy edifice bears a Chinese dragon with a parasol forming a fixed awning above the front entrance, a Peking lantern and Egyptian-inspired balconies now used by smoking employees of the Caixa de Sabadell *(Rambla de Sant Josep 99).*

Rambla dels Caputxins

The next stretch spans from Placa de Boquería to Carrer dels Escudellars. From there, Carrer de Ferran, between the lovely McDonald's and Burger King, cuts the main thoroughfare through the Barri Gòtic. Past it is the entrance to the Placa Reial and across the street the newly remodeled **Gran Teatre del Liceu**, the pride of Barcelona's opera set. The theater was built in 1848 in the Italian style after a monastery that claimed the site was destroyed in a fire and with its inauguration hailed as Europe's largest opera house. The site didn't fare any better in the ensuing years, though. Fires have decimated the opera house on three different occasions, first in 1861 when the auditorium was destroyed, again in 1893 when anarchists bombs exploded in its stalls and the last in 1994 when all but the exterior walls, foyer, staircase and one banquet hall went up in smoke.

After extensive restorations the theater reopened in 1999 looking almost as it had when it was first built, albeit three times the size and with a state-of-the art sprinkler system installed. Paying to see the opera is not necessary as guided tours show off the immaculate space, including a number of halls that have survived from the earliest days. *(Rambla dels Caputxins 51-59, ☎ 93 485 99 00, www.liceubarcelona.com, open daily for one guided tour at 10 am, 5.50€; non-guided tours begin at 11:30, 12 and 1, 3.50€.)*

Rambla de Sant Mònica

The last section of Las Ramblas is the least appealing, if only because it lacks trees and seems to receive an overflow of shady characters from Raval. Still, the artists that congregate along it add an element that is lacking up above and on weekends a crafts market crowds the lane. A booth in the middle sells tickets to the **Museu de Cera**, located down an alley of this section. Wax museums are spooky, and this one is no different. All the expected characters are in attendance, including Monroe, Franco and a Salvador Dalí looking eerily similar to the devil. *(Ptge/ Banca 7, ☎ 93 317 26 49, open Oct-Jun Mon.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm and 4:30-8:30 pm; July-Sept. 10 am-10 pm; entry 6.65€.)*

Monument al Colom

At the end of Las Ramblas overlooking Port Vell is a tall tribute to the man who discovered the Americas and soon thereafter returned to Barcelona and a heartwarming welcome from the King and Queen. Columbus stands proudly atop this 50-m (164-foot) column, pointing the way to the New World. The city built the monument in 1888, the year it hosted the World's Fair. An elevator carries tourists to the top observation deck for views over the city and sea. *(Open Oct.-May Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3:30-6:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-7 pm; June-Sept. 9 am-8:30 pm; entry 1.50€.)*

El Raval

Known in the past as China Town (Barri Xinès), El Raval has long borne the reputation as Barcelona's seediest district, home to red lights, drug peddlers and thugs out to make a buck without working for it; coincidentally, the Chinese were never a part of the mix. People like to say that Raval is on the up and up and in the past two decades the local government has taken measures to back this. Most recently, authorities plowed through a strip of run-down residences to create the tree-lined boulevard of Raval de la Rambla. The potential of Raval as Barcelona's hip district is obvious, in places, but at night it's still up to its old devices – there are just too many dark spaces and not enough cops to keep things on the straight and narrow.

As far as the residents are concerned, a large majority of whom are poor immigrants, many would just as soon keep the old ways than be faced with spiraling housing costs. Others miss the hedonistic vices that are slowly being displaced by bourgeois sensibilities. The discouraging facts may scare off the less brazen tourists.

Now to the good side. The neighborhood is six centuries old, for one; it is loaded with shops selling goods for half the price of other areas in town (everything is cheaper in Ravel); new chic restaurants are popping up on a regular basis, as are art galleries, since the founding of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; bars and clubs are wild, not on occasion, but all the time; and we tourists run into fewer of our own kind as we wander through the narrow medieval streets.

Palau Güell

By 1888 Gaudí's career prospects were assured after he designed this remarkable Modernist palace in Raval for the wealthy industrialist Count Eusebi de Güell, the architect's staunchest patron and benefactor. It is remarkable for its fluidity, curvilinear iron, parabolic arches and the ingenious

cupola of the main hall which emerges as a conical spire on the roof to bring light back down into the hall. The perforated honeycomb of the cupola is intended to mimic the movement of stars in the sky.

Palau Güell

From bottom to top, the palace shows Gaudí's emerging genius at integrating past architectural styles with religious and naturalistic concepts, heavy-handed as the result may be. The former stables of the basement were transformed through spellbinding brickwork similar to techniques put forth by skilled Moorish craftsmen centuries before. The interior salons and living rooms, all situated around the main hall, exhibit ornate Neo-Mudéjar and Gothic motifs. Organic columns frame the windows beneath these salons' intricately carved wood ceilings. The roof – always a favorite playground for Gaudí – is a forest of sculpted chimneys and ventilators embellished by irregular shaped colored ceramics, the first time he is said to have used this common Modernist technique known as *trencadís*.

Spinning atop the roof is a weather vane spiked through a star, bat and cross. And on the staunch stone façade the city's coat of arms, a mammoth iron construct, discreetly emulates a centipede crawling to the top.

Gaudí struggled with the main façade and created over 30 different plans for it before presenting Eusebi Güell with two to choose from. When the count chose the more unorthodox plan for a parabolic façade, the architect was assured of the creative license that would ensure his legacy, inspiring biographer Gijs van Hensbergen to write, "His imagination burnt holes through the musty pattern books." Eccentric old Eusebi had a fondness for holes himself. While hosting orchestral concerts and dinner parties at the palace, Güell is rumored to have eavesdropped on his guests' conversations through holes carved in the ceiling of the waiting rooms. Not surprisingly, some guests were never invited back. *(C/ Nou de la Rambla 3, open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-6:30 pm; entry with mandatory guided tour 2.50€.)*

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Inaugurated in 1995, Barcelona's massive contemporary art museum makes a bright statement in the dingy confines of Raval. The museum chronicles the last half of the 20th century contemporary art movement through a collection as varied and challenging as the times. Qualifying the works is a tall order, as they represent an astonishing range of visions and require a degree of interpretation that some may find bewildering, others refreshing: the art brut of Jean Dubuffet, the interactive installations of Bruce Nauman, the Surrealist paintings of Antonio Saura, the geometrical abstraction of Jorge Oteiza.... To break it down, the museum hosts frequent retrospectives on specific contemporary art movements. *(MACBA, Placa del Àngels 1, ☎ 93 412 08 10, www.macba.es; open Sept. 26-June 24 Mon.-Fri. 11 am-7:30 pm, Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm, closed Tues; June 25-Sept. 25 Mon.-Fri. 11 am-8 pm, Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm, closed Tues.; entry 7€.)*

Antic Hospital de la Sant Creu

This delightful 15th-century Gothic edifice may come as a surprise in the mostly lackluster confines of Raval. The erstwhile hospital of the holy cross opened in 1410 with the objective of consolidating Barcelona's various treatment facilities. To accomplish this, it became one of the first hospitals in the world with separate wings for specialized ailments; lepers, not surprisingly, were kept in their own wing.

The hospital has since been moved to the modernist complex of Hospital de la Sant Creu i Sant Pau designed at the turn of the century by Lluìs Domènech i Montaner, which in turn has been relieved of its crowded situation by a new state-of-the-art hospital complex inaugurated in 2003 and called, you guessed it, the Hospital de la Sant Creu i Sant Pau. The old hospital is now claimed by the Biblioteca National de Catalunya and it is normally closed to the general public except when hosting one of its frequent art exhibitions or music performances. These allow an opportunity take a gander at the old wings around the sprite Tuscan-inspired courtyard. *(C/ de l'Hospital 56, www.gencat.es/bc/.)*

La Ribera's El Born

Barcelona's historical quarter encompasses three zones: Raval; the Barri Gótic; and, across the noisy Vía Laietana from it, La Ribera, originally the abode of merchants and sailors, beginning in the 12th century. Within what remains a primarily working class neighborhood a beautiful thing has happened, known simply, proudly among its residents, as El Born.

While I was searching for a place to live in Barcelona a few years ago there seemed to be only one choice as far as the locals I consulted were concerned. Barceloneta was closest to the beach, but the neighborhood all but closed down after 11 o'clock; Raval was out of the question for obvious reasons; the Barri Gòtic was nice but overrun with tourists; Eixample was cheaper, the apartments were newer but the big city confines left something to be desired; El Born, on the other hand, was described as if it were a veritable oasis in this big city, a bastion of change, center of style, art and neighborly ways in – yes – a peaceful setting. I found a room in a converted mansion beside the palm tree just down from more graceful mansions and the Picasso museum.

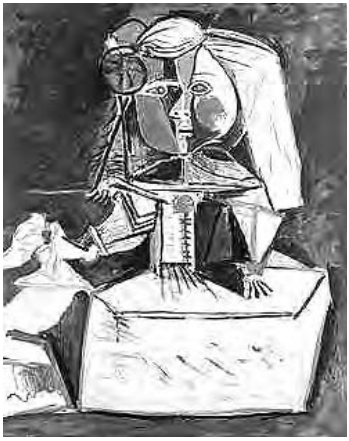
The Born became my stomping grounds, a place where I could be on a first-name basis with the tobacco lady and the ice cream girls and feel at home, could stand behind a painter for an hour and watch the neighborhood recreate itself on canvas, could frequent art galleries, eat dinner in small, romantic bistros, drink coffee in a fine courtyard in the mornings to the tune of a brass band and cocktails at night in a posh bar. In short, never leave.

The neighborhood of El Born is cornered by the Vía Laietana and Carrer de Princesa in the southeastern quadrant of La Ribera. The main pedestrian street is **Carrer de Montcada**, one of the fanciest addresses in town as far back as the 14th century, when wealthy locals sided it with mansions. It runs from Princesa past the Picasso Museum as far as the Iglesia de Santa Maria del Mar and the **Passeig del Born**, a tree-lined promenade sided by cafés, small eateries and cocktail bars that in an earlier life hosted medieval tournaments.

At the end of the Passeig del Born is the **Mercat del Born**, a beautiful pre-modernist open-air market designed in 1876 by Josep Fontserè i Mestre.

Once the lead wholesale market in the city, it has since closed and the discovery of Roman remains beneath it has delayed its conversion to the provincial library. On the east side of the church is the **Fossar de les Morares**, a plaza marked by a bent iron sculpture with an eternal flame, a burial place and monument to the Catalans who died defending the city during a 1714 siege by the Bourbons. On the opposite side of the church, outdoor terrace cafés crowd the **Placa Santa Maria** and the **Carrer de Argentería** trailing off from it. Throughout the neighborhood, though, narrow streets conceal more bars, restaurants, ethnic boutiques, antique shops and small art galleries.

Museu Picasso



Las Meninas, 1957

El Born and artists go hand-in-hand, thanks in no small part to the establishment in 1963 of the world's first Picasso museum, the 15th-century Palau Aguilar on Carrer de Montcada. The museum has since expanded to claim the neighboring Palau del Baró de Castellet and the Palau de Meca, both 17th-century constructions.

As the long lines outside foretell, only the Prado Museum in Madrid sees more visitors each year. The museum is focused on the work of Picasso's formative years from 1890 to 1905, much of which he spent in Barcelona. What the museum lacks in the way of Picasso's later years, it more than makes up for with an extensive collection of over 3,400 pieces tracing the artist's evolution from a young schoolboy in Málaga, as evidenced by an early portrait of his parents, up to his ascension as international icon.

Correlating the artist's work with his life is made easy by the informative placards placed outside each series of rooms, which begin with his works as an understudy to his father, an art professor who moved his family from Málaga to La Coruña and, finally, Barcelona. The next series of rooms, marked by a concentration of Cézanne-like still-life pieces, leads up to Picasso's instructive first visit to Paris, which inspired his somber Blue Period, as displayed in rooms 11-14. Conceding the obvious, the next three rooms signal a departure from the early Picassos, the series of 58 paintings from 1957 in which the artist reinterpreted Velázquez' masterpiece *Las Meninas* with cubic absurdity. The last of the rooms is dedicated to the artist's late years with displays of photographs and a sizable collection of 141 ceramics from his Rose Period donated by his widow Jacqueline. *(Montcada 15-23, ☎ 93 319 63 10, www.museupicasso.bcn.es, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 5€, free on the first Sunday each month.)*

Iglesia de Santa María del Mar

The pride of El Born, the 14th-century Iglesia de Santa María del Mar is an understated testament to Catalan Gothicism in the region, far removed from the ornate displays of Barcelona's other leading monuments. Built to honor the Virgin of the Sailors and to withstand the tempestuous mood of the nearby sea, the church was completed in less than half a century, thus pre-

venting later styles from creeping into the mix as has often been the case in Spain.

The benchmark of the austere Catalan style is the Santa María del Mar's single nave with slender support columns and an impossibly wide vaulted ceiling, which create a space more remarkable in vastness and soaring heights than in embellishment. This effect was heightened during the Spanish Civil War when the interior was gutted of its choir stalls and altarpiece by a fire, though the lovely stained glass rose window survived. Great acoustics have made the site a frequent venue for musical performances. *(Placa Santa María, ☎ 93 310 23 90, open 9 am-1:30 pm and 4:30 -8 pm; metro Jaume I.)*

El Palau de la Música Catalana

The acute attention to detail of Lluís Domènech I Montaner's Modernist music hall is dizzying. A leading modernist architect, Domènech's masterpiece does for music through architectural symbolism what Gaudí's Sagrada Familia does for religion. Unfortunately it is hard to get a satisfying look at the heralded hall as it is crowded by tall residences on a narrow Ribera street. To lessen the claustrophobia and make way for recent extensions, including a new underground, 600-capacity auditorium designed by Carlos Díaz and Òscar Tusquets, the Iglesia de Sant Francesc de Paula next door was recently demolished. That such a historical site in its own right would be destroyed to accommodate the opera hall is testament to the hall's place among the greatest of Barcelona's monuments.

The exterior consists of two façades bearing a bright array of mosaics joined at the corner by Miquel Blay's lively sculpture, *La Cancó Popular*, a tribute to popular Catalan song. A central colonnade is marked by floral embellishment and supports the busts of three famous composers – from left to right, Palestrina, Bach and Beethoven. Inside, a fantastic mural by Massot adorns the vestibule; winged horses careen toward the ceiling; support arches depict popular musical genres; a colorful row of muses play traditional instruments over the apse-shaped stage with its elegant pipe organ; and an inverted cupola of stained glass lightens the already festive mood of the auditorium. Even the bathrooms of the Lluís Millet Hall, named for the founder of the 100-year-old resident choir Orfeó Català, make tending to business an elegant affair. Performances are held throughout the year, normally two to three times per week; tickets can cost well over 200€, depending on the performance. A guided tour is a much more affordable way to experience the space. *(C/ de Sant Francesc de Paula 2, ☎ 93 295 72 00; ticket office across the street in Les Muses del Palau shop; guided visits every half-hour Mon.-Sun. 10 am-3:30 pm, 7€.)*

Eixample Esquerre & Eixample Dret

> *"Men are divided into two categories: men of words and men of action. The former talk, the latter act. I belong to the second group. I lack the means of expressing myself. I could not tell you about the concept of art. I need to give it a concrete form. I have never had time to question myself. I have spent my time working."* Antoni Gaudí

The Eixample is a city within the city, the true cosmopolitan side of Barcelona. Laid out in a grid of uniform streets and residential blocks, this mixed residential and commercial neighborhood is generally sharp, clean and stylish; more importantly, it is practical and has, since its construction,

helped to alleviate a number of the city's problems. When the Industrial Revolution caught up with Barcelona in the mid-18th century, the city's population began to increase dramatically. The need for more space led to an extensive urban planning scheme that resulted in the development of Eixample, or "enlargement." Ildefons Cerdà carried out the design for this large, grid neighborhood in 1869, having originally envisioned an open-class neighborhood of self-sufficient sections, each with its own hospital, school, markets and parks where the upper, middle and working class could commingle.

The Eixample would consist most notably of two corresponding neighborhoods, the right (*dret*) and left (*esquerre*), with streets running parallel and perpendicular to the Mediterranean between eight-sided city blocks, the result of lopping off the building corners to create a greater sense of open space at intersections. Developers saw things in a different light than Cerdà, however, and soon the rich were swooping in to buy up plots in the new development, ensuring that the working class would remain in the older cities along the seafront.

The timing of this extension corresponded perfectly with the development of Modernist architecture, inspiring many of these wealthy insurgents as well as city planners to commission preeminent architects of the movement like Gaudí, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Pere Falqués to embellish the neighborhood. Eixample, as a result, is nothing short of a vast, open-air museum of this movement.

Mancana de la Discòrdia

Contrary to popular opinion, it was not a friendly architectural competition between the leading Mondernisme architects that led to the three stylistically distinct buildings on this block. They have, however, competed for attention ever since, for which the block has appropriately come to be called the Block of Discord.

On the corner of Passeig de Gràcia and Consell de Cent is the **Casa Lleó Morera** *(1903-1905, Passeig de Gràcia 35)*, designed by Lluìs Domènech i Montaner. While later renovations by a leather goods store have undone much of the architect's original work, the flowery façade retains many of the curves, stained glass and mosaics representative of the Modernisme style. Notice the second-floor sculptures representing cutting-edge technology of the times, a telephone, gramophone and lightbulbs.

Walking down the Passeig de Gràcia you'll be overwhelmed by the smells trailing out of the **Museu del Perfum**, a weird ploy to make a buck. The front of the store sells the toilet water while in the back is a display of perfume bottles from ancient Greek ceramic flasks to chic, modern bottle designs of today *(Pg. De*

Casa Lleó Morera

Gràcia 39, open Mon.-Fri. 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 4:30 -8 pm, Sat. 10:30 am-1:30 pm). Past it there is the cookie-cutter **Casa Amatller** *(1898, Passeig de Gràcia 41)* by Josep Puig i Cadafalch, notable for its Flemish-inspired stepped gable and the bright interior décor designed by the architect. The house is the center for the Ruta del Modernisme tour of Barcelona and maintains an exhibition on the movement. Next to it, the **Casa Batlló** *(1905-1907, Passeig de Gràcia 43)* is unmistakably Gaudí. Its polychromatic mosaic reflects a reptilian sheen, ornamental roof tiles said to represent scales, and bone-shaped tribunes across the façade indicate the architect found his inspiration in the city's dragon-slaying patron Saint George. A sole column topped with a handle-shaped star disappears into the façade, representing the sword that pierced the dragon's heart. The shower-effect of the blue-tiled central courtyard is open for conjecture, as are the undulating balconies, which have been likened to carnival masks.

Fundació Antoni Tàpies

The building that put Lluìs Domènech i Montaner on the Modernisme map in 1885 was a publishing house before the works of one of Spain's greatest living artists were moved in. At some level Barcelona-born Antoni Tàpies may be considered an abstract expressionist. His paintings deal with the constantly evolving state of matter. *(C/ Aragó 255, ☎ 93 487 03 15, www.fundaciotapies.org, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-8 pm; entry 4€.)*

Casa Milà (1905)

Gaudí had just completed Casa Batlló when it drew the attention of a local developer named Pere Milà i Camps. In short order he had commissioned the architect to design an apartment building across the street that, when complete, would become the poster child for Modernisme. Coincidentally, the top floors of the building were ordered destroyed soon after completion when city inspectors realized the Casa Milà exceeded the space allowed in the building permit by over 4,700 square feet. Concerned patrons intervened and the building was rightfully declared of artistic significance, thus saving it from desecration. UNESCO has since declared it a World Heritage Site. The great gray edifice with its whimsical set of chimneys and ventilators is commonly known as *La Pedrera* (The Stone Quarry), as its undulating stone façade appears to have been carved or eroded by weather, creating striations. The building is maintained by the Centre Cultural Caixa Catalunya, which hosts regular art exhibitions for free in the apartment complex's ground-floor hall. Don't just step into the gift shop. Endure the long line outside to see a model Modernisme apartment from the turn of the 20th century and wander around the Espai Gaudí, the attics and roof with a multimedia display on Gaudí and his work, as well as a café with one of the best terraces in town. *(C/ Provenca 261-265, ☎ 90 240 09 73, www.caixacatalunya.es; open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm; entry 7€.)*

Temple Expiatori de La Sagrada Familia

Had he not been derailed in life by a streetcar, Gaudí still would not have lived to see his masterwork complete, a project he forecasted would last generations. He spent 43 years working on the temple after taking over and completely overhauling the original Neo-Gothic project in 1883. During the years

leading up to his death in 1926, he worked exclusively on the temple, after which he was interred in its crypt.

> *"For the first time since I had been in Barcelona I went to look at the cathedral, a modern cathedral, and one of the most hideous buildings in the world. It has four crenellated spires exactly the shape of hock bottles. Unlike most of the churches in Barcelona, it was not damaged during the Revolution – it was spared because of its 'artistic value,' people said. I think the Anarchists showed bad taste in not blowing it up when they had the chance."* George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*

When the temple of the Holy Family is ultimately finished (estimates put the completion date another 35 years off), it will stand as one of the great symbolic wonders in the world, a moving and controversial manifestation of religion as interpreted through a Modernist's eye that has inspired both praise and condemnation. The American architect Louis Sullivan declared it "the greatest piece of creative architecture in the last 25 years. It is spirit symbolized in stone." Twelve bell towers, each 75 m (246 feet) tall, will represent the Apostles in groups of four on each of the three façades. Another four representing the evangelists at 125 m (410 feet) tall each will surround a 140-m (460-foot) tower of the Virgin topped with a star. The tallest tower, at 170 m (558 feet) high in the center of the temple, will be dedicated to Christ.

> *"There is nothing in the world like it. It is Disney whimsicality raised to the level of soaring nobility. It is metaphysical conceit humanized with crockets and pompons. It is scrawl and mysticism, vision and fancy, an evanescent dream hammered into sempiternal solidity."* Anthony Burgess

Work was reinitiated on the temple in 1952 based on a scale model with explanations of symbolism the architect had left behind. Gaudì's specifications for the construction techniques to be used were burned along with his crypt during the Spanish Civil War, causing much consternation since. Thus far, eight of the apostle towers have been built corresponding with the nativity and passion façade.

During his lifetime Gaudí saw the near-completion of just one of the towers, as well as the nativity façade, which depicts the birth and childhood of Christ. Its three portals correspond to the Holy Trinity, above which angels sound trumpets and doves representing faith roost in an emerald-colored cypress tree. For the sculptures of the nativity façade, Gaudí used actual people and one donkey to create the molds. In his search for the perfect ass, Gaudí was presented with the finest donkeys Barcelona had to

offer, but he rejected each of them and instead chose a haggard, shrunken donkey which he saw one day leading a sand cart down the road. When questioned, the architect replied, "Not one of the figures you see here in stone is imaginary; they all stand here just as I have seen them in reality... Mary, with the child of Jesus, was not to be mounted on a fine strong animal, but on one poor, old and weary, and surely one which had something kindly in its face and understood what it was all about." Such motivations breathe life into the stationary forms of the temple at *almost* every vantage point. This seems to have been lost on Josep Subirach, the architect who has undertaken the Passion façade and adorned it with soulless, robot-like sculptures depicting figures from the Holy Supper through the Crucifixion and Entombment. One beacon of hope, though, is the 4 x 4 cryptogram which Subirach, and not Gaudí, created. Each of its rows, diagonals and columns add up to 33, the age of Christ upon his death. The last to be completed will be the spectacular main entrance of the Glory façade, complete with clouds and allegorical inscriptions representing Christ's ascension into heaven.

As the Sagrada Familia has relied strictly on private funding throughout its existence, your paid admission helps to fund the ongoing construction. It is a subtle guilt trip, but each euro brings the collaborators closer to actually making that 2041 completion date when all those tacky skyscrapers can be removed from the Barcelona skyline, as emblematic as they seem to have become.

Once inside, you can wander around the Museu del Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Familia, an exhibition detailing the construction techniques and materials used in the temple, or hike over 200 steps (I lost count) to the top of the nativity towers for a look at its concrete and rebar innards. There will undoubtedly be a long line, making for a slow go – two, three steps at a time up a narrow spiraling corridor with plenty of interesting graffiti carved in the walls on the way up. An elevator also accesses the top, though its lines are twice as long since it can only handle three people at a time. *(C/ Mallorca 4010, ☎ 93 207 30 31, www.sagradafamilia.org, open Oct.-March 9 am-6 pm, April-Sept. 9 am-8 pm; entry 8€, 5€ for students; lift 2€.)*

Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau

Inspired by the garden hospitals of France that had come into favor around the turn of the 20th century, Catalan financier Pau Gil i Sierra commissioned Modernisme architect Lluìs Domènech i Montaner to recreate the style in Spain. The result was no less than a city within a hospital, consisting of wide streets, avenues and gardens connecting 48 lavishly ornamented Modernisme pavilions, each dedicated to a specific medical specialty. Mudéjar elements are immediately obvious, from the predominant use of red brick to the pavilion domes covered in colorful Arabic ceramic tiles, details which the architect's son Pere was responsible for carrying out. In a show of genius, Montaner the elder incorporated an underground passage system to connect the complex and spare sick patients from having to venture outside during nasty weather.

Traipse around the complex to check out the spread, paying particular notice to the central administrative pavilion adorned with bright mosaics, sculptures and a clock steeple tower; or join a guided visit, which allows you to wander from pavilion to pavilion through the cool subterranean thoroughfare. *(C/ de Sant Antoni M. Claret 167-171, guided tours Sat. and Sun. 10, 11, 12 am, 5 and 6 pm from June to Oct.)*

Modernisme

What is Modernisme in Catalan is and is not Moderniste in Castilian Spain, Art Nouveau in Belgium and France and the Modern Style in Britain and the USA. It is because the movement in Cataluña emerged during the same period toward the end of the 19th century and had petered out by 1920; in Europe it roughly coincided with the Belle Époque era of economic prosperity, enlightened thought and creativity that preceded World War I; like the others, Modernisme marked a shift from old, tired ways of thinking about architecture, the decorative and applied arts.

It is not because Cataluña had its own unique set of issues that would shape the looks and the motivations behind this new style. By the 19th century Cataluña had begun to emerge from a long period of cultural suppression and economic woes exacerbated by a totalitarian regime in Madrid. New maritime trade and the development of an industrial revolution brought about economic prosperity and the desire for change in and around Barcelona. The result was the Renaixenca, a rebirth in art and politics characterized by a surge in Catalan nationalism. These new issues gelled and were manifested in the structures of Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926) and his contemporaries, namely Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1850-1923) and Josep Puig i Cadafach (1867-1957) – all fierce nationalists. Puig was an intense student of Catalan history who sought to enlighten his generation of the past events that had made Cataluña such a uniquely independent entity; like Puig, Domènech was a noted scholar and nationalist politician; Gaudí, though less ensconced in these ideals toward the end of his life, had great pride in his native land and once spent a number of months in jail for refusing to speak Castilian Spanish.

The prosperity of Barcelona's bourgeois class meant that there was sufficient capital for these architects to realize their visions. Their works, though distinct from one another, bear a number of similarities. They utilized new building techniques and materials like sheet iron, steel, concrete and industrial glass to create highly ornamented, fluid, often asymmetrical monuments. Floral motifs were common, religious overtones obvious and the beauty of nature and historical events usually implied. It was a new look, but one that relied on past architectural movements, particularly the Romanesque, Mudéjar and Gothic to impart a depth that otherwise might have been lacking. As the ubiquitous images of Barcelona's patron Saint George and the Cataluñan Coat of Arms indicate on almost all of these monuments, Modernisme was, above all, a chance to be heard.

Ruta del Modernisme

Though he was the leading figure of Modernisme, Gaudí was but one of the movement's architects to have left a lasting imprint on the city of Barcelona. If the whimsical, organic and vibrantly colored forms strike your fancy, the work of Lluìs Domènech i Montaner (1850-1923) and Josep Puig i Cadafalch

(1867-1956) should not be missed. Along with Gaudí and a handful of others, these two architects are credited as the driving force behind the movement.

The Ruta del Modernisme is not a guided tour, but the staff on hand in the Casa Amatller does offer a discounted multi-pass and informative pamphlets that map out a route to follow in order to reach the many Modernisme sites, among them Domènech's Castell dels Tres Dragons, Hospital de Sant Pau and Palau de la Música Catalan and Puig's Casa Martí (home to the famous café Els Quatre Gats), Casa de les Punxes and Palau Baró de Quardras, now housing the Museu de la Música.

All told, there are over 50 sites along the route, making it all but impossible to see every one of them in a day's walk. You can pick and choose. With limited time, stick to the sites mentioned above and those of Gaudí, namely the Casa Milà, Palau Güell, Parc Güell and Sagrada Familia. *(Centre del Modernisme, Casa Amatller, Pg. De Gràcia 41, ☎ 93 488 01 39, www.rutamodernisme.com.)*

Barceloneta, Port Vell & Port Olímpic

Along the Mediterranean shoreline Barcelona reveals its sunnier side, one noticeably removed from the commercial bustle and tortoise pace of senior tour groups in the city center, with fresh air permeated by seafood and suntan oil, where sailboats replace cars and the main thoroughfare is a sandy one. The old and occasionally musty mariner's quarter of **Barceloneta** was built in the 18th century atop a wedge of sand that accumulated once the city's port was built in the 17th century. "Like Venus," it is said, "Barceloneta rose from the waters." It separates the city's two ports and marks the beginning of the city's long expanse of man-made beach. In this 18th-century neighborhood residents retain their own sense of identity and see little use in venturing into the "city" when they've got all they need right here *and* the water.

In the summertime the main promenade between Port Vell and Barceloneta resembles a conveyer belt shuffling masses of people to and from the beach either bare-chested and sunburned or looking to get that way. A block into Barceloneta and the whole neighborhood might as well be on tranquilizers. Instead of obnoxious hosts trying to corral passers-by into their tourist-trapping terrace restaurants along the promenade, great little seafood restaurants stand on their own merits with a menu posted outside and the host where he belongs, inside. In the afternoon and evenings residents poke their heads out of fourth-floor windows and make small talk with their neighbors across the way while hanging laundry on the clothesline; when they close their shutters for the night, it is generally assumed that the rest of the neighborhood and the few corner bars will follow soon after, which they normally do.

At the base of Las Ramblas **Port Vell**, Barcelona's oldest port, has long been the nexus of the city's maritime activity. In recent years it has been transformed into an attractive recreational harbor and its wharfs turned into colorful pedestrian promenades. South of the Placa del Portal de la Pau with Gaietà Buïgas' monument to Columbus are the former shipyards of Drassanes, where the powerful Catalan navy was once stationed. The 14th-century Gothic complex is credited as the largest and best preserved of its kind in Europe and now houses the city's **Museo Marítim**. Beneath this museum's tall arched ceiling are reproductions of old-world ships and troves

of nautical miscellany, much of which is devoted to the Catalan Navy. *(Avda Drassanes s/n, ☎ 93 32 99 20, www.diba.es/mmaritim, open Mon.-Sun. 10 am-7 pm; entry: 5.40€.)*

A wooden drawbridge next to the Columbus monument links the port promenade to the Moll d'Espanya and the recreational and commercial complex of Maremàgnum, built for the 1992 Olympic games. In and around this three-story monstrosity are bars and discos, restaurants, open-air cafés, shops, a standard and IMAX theater and **L'Aquàrium** with an 80-m (262-foot) undersea tunnel and lots of sharks, rays and colorful fishies. *(Moll d'Espanya, ☎ 93 221 74 74, wwww.aquariumbcn.com, open 9:30 am-9 pm.)*

ADVENTURES ON WATER

A fleet of *golondrinas* are anchored at the Drassanes wharf beneath the Columbus monument. For 3.50€ you can hop on one of these open-air boats and take a 35-minute seaside tour of the city. In the summertime the boats run from 11:45 am-7:30 pm. There are also two catamarans that make daily trips from the wharf to the Playa del Bogatell beyond the Port Olímpic.

Hosting the 1992 Olympic games meant that Barcelona would need to undertake a rejuvenation and expansion project not unlike that of the Eixample a hundred years earlier. New facilities would be needed for the athletes and the massive tourist crowds that the games would inevitably attract and the city seized on the opportunity to not only accomplish this, but to give itself a colorful facelift in the process. Areas throughout the city were beautified and built up with new facilities, but the city wisely chose to focus its attention on what was a grimy industrial neighborhood with a rocky coastline just beyond Barceloneta. A world-class team of architects – Oriol Bohigas, David Mackay, Albert Puigdomènech, Josep Martorell and engineer Joan Ramon de Clascà – was assembled to design the new neighborhood and waterfront and, once it was complete and the games had been declared a grand success, Barcelona had undeniably raised the bar for future host cities of the Olympic Games. These days the **Port Olímpic** and **Villa Olímpic** neighborhood is a prime tourist attraction with its long promenade spanning fine, sandy manmade beaches and a lively port area ringed by bars and terrace restaurants and unmistakable with its Peix Daurat, a giant goldfish designed by Frank O. Gehry and the looming twin 153-meter (500-foot) skyscrapers, one housing the luxurious Hotel Art and the other the offices of MAPFRE.

Though parts of the area have lapsed into decay and attracted Barcelona's graffiti artists, the seafront remains attractive and benefits from a tourist revival each summer. The rest of the year, however, it is a mostly dead scene. When things are in full swing, when the chiringuito bars are rocking each night and the beaches crowded all day, expect to pay a premium to partake.

Montjuïc

A natural defensive rampart overlooking Barcelona's port, Montjuïc has evolved from an overgrown heap with a hulky 18th-century castle set atop it to a literal highpoint of the city's culture and a great place to walk around. The Mountain of the Jews, so-named because its defensive fortifications were

built atop a Jewish cemetery, got its first makeover in 1929 when Barcelona hosted the World Exhibition. Its slopes were terraced with gardens, a stadium and other facilities were built, along with an intriguing mock city representing the various architectural styles found throughout Spain. By the time the hill was prettied up for the 1992 Olympic games it boasted numerous museums and parks and, on summer evenings, a spectacular light show.

Improvements are already underway for Barcelona's next big event, the 2004 Forum of Cultures, which will tackle issues ranging from world peace to urban renewal. As Montjuïc was also once a rock quarry, grayish brown chunks of it can be found on buildings throughout Barri Gòtic.

There are a number of ways to reach Montjuïc. The blue route of the Bus Turístic makes a pass through the hill. Buses 50, 55 and 61 can be caught at the Placa de Espanya and at other stops throughout town. From the metro stop Paral-lel a funicular train runs to the Esació Park Montjuïc midway up the mountain, and from where you can catch the Telefèric to reach the castle near the top.

From the port area you can climb up the Torre de St. Sebastìa next to the first beach or the Torre de Jaume on the Moll de Barcelona near the Mirador de Colón and ride the cable car (*funicular aereo*) to the top. Or just walk up from the Placa de Espanya.

Palau Nacional & Around

From the circular Placa de Espanya two Venetian-styled towers mark the approach to Montjuïc. Straight ahead is the **Font Màgica** designed by Carles Buigas for the 1929 World Exhibition, an over-the-top fountain that becomes a dazzling spectacle of lights and music Thursday through Sunday evenings during the summer. Water cascades into the fountain from terraces before the extravagant Neoclassical Palau Nacional just beyond, built as an exhibition space for the World Exhibition and now home to the **Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya**. MNAC houses the country's most comprehensive collection of Catalan Romanesque art. Many of the murals, sculptures, metalwork and wood carvings dating from the 11th to the 13th centuries were spirited away from Romanesque churches in the Pyrenees, where they were replaced by replicas to keep burglars and private purveyors from getting their dirty paws on them. Other salons are devoted to Catalan Gothic artwork and Renaissance paintings. *(Palau Nacional, ☎ 93 622 03 75, www.mnac.es; open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-2:30 pm; entry 4.80€.)*

Poble Espanyol

Barcelona is such an easy stopover on a tour of western Europe that it is often the only Spanish city tourists make the time to visit. And certainly this might have been the case when the crowds flocked to the city for the 1929 World Exhibition. Thus the adept designers behind the exhibition came up with a fine solution to the dilemma. They decided to bring the rest of the country to the visitors. The resulting Spanish Village comprised 81 buildings, each (including the streets) meticulously copied from notable originals spread throughout the country. In many cases stone was quarried from the very same spots that had supplied the real buildings; even cracks were reproduced, such was the attention to detail. Initially proposed as a temporary exhibition, the village was so solidly built and immediately popular that it was left for the en-

joyment of visitors and 70 years after the fact remains in remarkably good condition – in some cases better than the originals.

After paying the 7€ entry fee and passing through a gate modeled after one in Avila's defensive wall you are free to wander through plazas, past shops where traditional Spanish crafts like weaving and wood marquetry are practiced. Over here you can step into Galicia, then enter the world of Andalucía or Castile. It is, no doubt, a tourist-oriented complex, with bars, a disco and pricey restaurants, but the chance to see a small slice of the whole country for a few euros is a bargain. *(Avda Marqués de Comillas, ☎ 93 508 63 00, open Mon. 9 am-8 pm, Tues.-Thurs. 9 am-2 pm, Fri-Sat. 9 am-4 pm, Sun. 9 am-noon.)*

Anella Olímpica

From the Poble Espanyol, the Avinguda Estadi winds up and around to the Olympic Circle, with its star attraction the **Estadi Olímpic de Montjuïc** *(open 10 am-8 pm),* built in the 1920s in a failed bid to host the 1932 Olympic Games. When the city did finally get its Olympic Games in 1992, the architects Alfonso Milà and Federic Correa were hired to revamp the stadium in order to host the major events. The adjacent **Galería Olímpica** houses an exhibition on the construction and events of the Olympic Games *(open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm; entry 2.40€)*. Next to it is the **Institut Nacional d'Educació Física de Catalunya** (INEFC), a physical education study center designed by Catalan architect Ricardo Bofill. An esplanade loomed over by the avant-garde telecommunications tower designed by Santiago Calatrava leads to the circular Placa Europa. Beside it is the **Palau d'Esports Sant Jordi**, a large sports and concert hall designed by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, and the **Piscines Bernat Picornell**, the Olympic pools and exercise facilities that are now open to the public. *(Mon.-Fri. 7 am-9:45 pm, Sat. 8 am-6 pm, Sun. 9 am-2 pm; entry 3.50€ per hour.)*

Fundació de Joan Miró

The spatial world of Barcelona-born artist Joan Miró (1893-1983) is captured in this bright and airy indoor-outdoor museum. Miró was among Spain's greatest 20th-century avant-garde painters. He created Surrealist images before the movement took shape, and then refused to be considered a part of it, declaring later in life that "painting must be murdered." His early works, the saturated realist landscapes of his native Cataluña, gave way to intuitive, collage-based pieces painted in primary colors from an infantile perspective. Later, the Spanish Civil War and the reign of Franco spawned a series of 50 dark, angry lithographs known as his Barcelona series.

When Franco died Miró's work became brighter, more spatial, characterized by loose cosmic symbols floating on an empty white canvas as epitomized in his famous *Constel-lacions* series. In reflecting on these works, the artist once said, "The spectacle of the sky overwhelms. I'm overwhelmed when I see, in an immense sky, the crescent of the moon, or the sun. There, in my pictures, tiny forms in huge empty spaces. Empty spaces, empty horizons, empty plains – everything which is bare has always greatly impressed me."

In his later years Miró began to explore new techniques, dabbling with engravings and ceramics and large installations. In 1975 he established this foundation in collaboration with his friend Joan Prats to exhibit his and others' works. The building, which puts an emphasis on natural lighting and, not surprisingly, large, white expanses of nothing but space with "tiny forms" strewn across it, was designed by the artist's friend Josep Lluís Sert. *(☎ 93 443 94 70, www.bcn.fjmiro.es, open Oct.-June Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Thurs. 10 am-9:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-2:30 pm; July-Sept. Tues.-Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Thurs. 10 am-9:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-2:30 pm; entry 7.20€.)*

Castell de Montjuïc

The star-shaped defensive compound was built in the 18th century over the remains of an earlier castle and, beneath that, a Jewish cemetery. During Franco's reign it served as a military prison where many of the fierce Catalan nationalists who weren't immediately executed were held to rot. A visit to the compound affords terrific views of the city. The **Museu Militar** inside preserves a few 1,000-year-old Jewish tombstones, but mostly houses 18th-century military regalia, including canons, swords, coats of arms and the like. *(☎ 93 329 86 13, open Nov.-March 15 9:30 am-5 pm, March 16-Oct. 9:30 am-8 pm; entry 2.50€.)*

■ Beaches

It is hard to enjoy a relaxing day at the beaches of Barcelona with some 200 immigrant sand salesmen trudging back and forth shouting, *"agua fria, coke, cerveza, patat..."* And then there are the crowds and the cigarette butts and the sand that turns the bottom of your feet black. But, if it is action you crave and miles of bronze beauties, here you will find it. The beaches of Barcelona begin at the corner of the Barceloneta neighborhood and Port Vell. From here on it is one long, man-made swath, distinguished by the names **Platja de San Sebastià** and **Platja de la Barceloneta** and little else.

Locals often use the rusted iron and glass sculpture known simply as the cubes (*los cubos*) as a landmark and meeting point. On this stretch there is one *chiringuito* or beach bar selling drinks and snacks where there once were many. The pedestrian promenade known as the **Passeig Marítim**, however, is lined with terrace cafés and restaurants and a few supermarkets so you don't have to pay inflated prices for the cold beer offered by the sand salesmen.

The promenade continues on to the **Platja Passeig Marítim** beneath the twin towers of Port Olímpic and beyond to skirt the beaches of **Nova Icària** and **Bogatell**. Most refer to the first stretch simply as Barceloneta Beach and this last stretch as Bogatell. The beaches beyond the port are typically less crowded and have more (and better) *chiringuitos* that stay open late and have DJs to spin the tunes. Nighttime is the right time to experience Barcelona's beaches when the locals scatter across the sand in groups to sing, drink and watch the sun come up.

■ Parks

Parc Güell

The planned city that never came to fruition is pure Gaudí, a fantastical park set on a tree-covered hill overlooking the city and the sea with all the undulating shapes, the *trencadí* mosaics (colorful titles broken into odd shapes, then rearranged in a design) with their hidden meanings that were the architect's stock and trade. Which is why it wasn't surprising when a group of young Americans I'd met, secure in their European beards and feed store hats, told me they were headed to Gaudí's park to trip on mushrooms. It's not really necessary, I thought. The place is strange enough as it is.

The main entry gate is flanked by two whimsical houses with wavey roofs covered by the broken tile mosaics that color the park at every turn and topped by twisting spiracles. One supports a four-sided cross that was a common feature of Gaudí's work. The other, ironically, hoists a mock *amanita muscaria*, a wild, hallucinogenic mushroom. The buildings were to serve as the porter house and an administration center for the upscale housing development originally planned for the hill. In 1900 financier Eusebi Güell purchased these 84 acres and commissioned Gaudí to create a private, garden city based on English models.

Gaudí worked on the park from 1900-1914 but the scheme never worked out. Of the 60 planned houses, only three were built; one for the Trías family, another for Count Eusebi and a third for Gaudí, who lived in the park for a number of years before his death. His house has since been converted into the **Casa-Museu Gaudí** to display furniture and other personal objects that belonged to the architect as well the drawing plans for many of his projects. To reach it, mount the grand staircase facing the entrance to the park and veer up the trails to the right. The staircase is divided by a colorful lizard that spits drainage water from the upper levels of the park out its mouth. The steps lead to the **Sala Hipóstila**, a covered hall intended as the marketplace of the garden city. Its roof is supported by 86 Doric columns, and it is also the base of the expansive plaza above it. The **Placa de la Naturalesa** offers one of the best views of the city and the Mediterranean and the coolest park bench in the world. The bright bench and balustrade was covered in *trencadís* (broken tile mosaics) by Gaudí's friend J.M. Jujol; it winds around the perimeter of the elevated plaza creating perfect nooks and crannies for sitting.

Steps lead down to the canted arcade carved into the side of the hill, a favorite spot for pictures. Covered in earthen stones and mimicking the exposed roots of tree, it signifies Gaudí's concept that the development should be a harmonious extension of nature. *(C/ Olot s/n. Park open Nov.-Feb. 10 am-6 pm; March-Oct. 10 am-7 pm; April-Sept. 10 am-8 pm; May-Aug. 10 am-9 pm. Casa-Museu Gaudí, ☎ 93 219 38 11, open Nov.-Feb. 10 am-6 pm; March, April, Oct. 10 am-7 pm; May-Sept. 10 am-8 pm. Metro Lesseps; buses 24, 25, 28, 31, 32, 74).*

Parc de La Ciudadela

The hippest park in Spain comes alive on Sundays when local percussionists gather to beat their drums while neo-hippies line the walkways selling baked goods, handmade clothes and jewelry, artwork and massages. It's a far cry

from the 18th century, when King Felipe V had a military citadel (*ciudadela*) constructed on these grounds to subjugate the citizens of Barcelona for having opposed his ascension to the throne during the War of Succession (1714).

In 1868 the city leveled all but the chapel and the Baroque governor's palace of this bad memory and in 1888 the park was transformed for the Universal Exhibition. Under the guidance of Josep Fonserè, two tree-lined promenades were created alongside a pond surrounded by manicured gardens and a great cascading fountain with sculptures by Nobas and Vallmitjana. Josep Amargós was responsible for the Pre-Moderniste **Hivernacle**, a greenhouse that has since been converted into a cultural center.

The park is not all about drumbeats and hashish, though. The former governor's palace now houses the fine **Museu d'Art Modern** (MNAC), which chronicles the 19th- and 20th-century Catalan art movements from Neo-Classicism through Modernisme, the Generation of 1917 and Avant-Garde art. *(☎ 93 319 57 28, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-2:30 pm; entry 3€.)*

The imposing red brick Castell dels Tres Dragons, designed by Domènech i Montaner originally as a very fortified restaurant, is now occupied by the **Museu de Zoología**, a museum devoted to the classification of the animal kingdom, with other exhibits on bees, birds and the English naturalist Charles Darwin. *(☎ 93 319 69 12, open Tues., Wed., Fri.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm, Thurs. 10 am-6:30 pm; entry 3.50€ includes admission to Geology Museum.)*

The **Museu de Geologia** has all manner of rocks, minerals and fossils *(☎ 93 319 68 95, open Tues., Wed., Fri.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm, Thurs. 10 am-6:30 pm; entry 3.50€ includes admission to the Zoology Museum).*

The city's other zoo is the **Parc Zoològic**. The animals don't have much room to roam in this small zoo, but the kids won't mind when there are animals to be petted, pony rides, dolphins and Snowflake, the world's only captive white gorilla. *(Parc de la Ciudadella, ☎ 93 225 67 80, open Nov.-Feb. 10 am-5 pm; Mar. and Oct. 10 am-6 pm; April and Sept. 10 am-7 pm; May-Aug. 9:30 am-7:30 pm; entry 10€, children 6.50€.)* Small boats can be rented at the park's central pond.

Mount Tibidabo

How many times has a foreigner looked up to the hill west of Barcelona and wondered what that palatial silhouette is? It's too far off to see clearly and for most too far off to go investigate. To save the effort (unless a good view and a few rusty amusement park rides are appealing) let it be known that the silhouette belongs to the **Templo Expiatorio de Sagrat Cor**; the Church of the Sacred Heart is base, audacious, tasteless but it seems to have settled the score with the devil.

Mount Tibidabo takes its name from a legend that the Devil brought Jesus here to tempt him with the pleasures of the earth, *"Haec omnia tibi dabo si cadens adoraberis me"* (All this I shall give to you if you fall down and worship me). The church (which is in fact two churches stacked like a cheap wedding cake topped by a giant bronze statue of Christ) was begun under the guidance of Enric Sagnier in 1902, but not completed until 1961.

You can catch an elevator up to the top, or head over to the **Parc d'Atraccions** to really get high. It was begun around the same time as the church, making it Spain's first amusement park and Europe's second. It's all

here, the roller coasters, ferris wheels, a carousel, shooting stands and the 'terrifying' Krüeger Hotel, where actors dressed like Jack the Ripper, Jason and other scary personalities are guaranteed to make your hair stand on end! From the amusement park you can catch the mini-train or walk to the Torre de Collserola, a 560-m (1,837-foot) glass observation deck with a lift to get you all the way up there *(☎ 93 406 93 54).*

To reach the top of Tibidabo, catch the Bus Turistique or urban buses 17, 22, 58, 73 or 85 in the city. These will take you to the base and Placa Kennedy, where you can catch the Tramvia Blau, Barcelona's only remaining tram, up to Placa de Dr. Andreu *(10:05 am-9:55 pm, weekdays 7:05 am-9:55 pm; 1.80€, round-trip 2.55€).* From this plaza hop on the funicular railway to get the rest of the way up *(1.80€ or 2.40€ round-trip).*

■ Nightlife

Performance Arts

Expect to pay a premium to enjoy performances at the classic venues in Barcelona. The star attraction is the **Gran Teatre del Liceu** *(C/ Sant Pau 1, ☎ 93 412 35 32)*, which hosts operas from November through June. The **Palau de la Música Catalana** *(C/ Sant Francesc de Paula 2, ☎ 93 268 10 00)* hosts musical performances on a regular basis throughout the year, many by the 100-year-old resident choir Orfeó Català.

The city's summer theater festival is staged at the **Teatre Grec** atop Montjuïc *(Palau de la Virreina, ☎ 93 301 77 75)*, though there are countless other theaters throughout the city, including the **Teatre Nacional de Catalunya** *(Placa de les Arts 1, ☎ 93 306 57 40)* and the **Teatre Poliorama** *(La Rambla 115, ☎ 93 318 81 81).*

Cinema

During the summer film freaks pack a picnic to watch movies outdoors in the **Plaza Mayor of the Poble Espanyol** *(Montjuïc, Avda Marquès de Comillas 24, ☎ 93 508 63 00, Thurs., Fri. and Sat. at 9:30).*The largest theater in town, with 15 screens and the most American movies in V.O., is **Icària-Yelmo** in the Villa Olímpic *(C/ Salvador Espira 61; ☎ 93 221 75 85, www.yelmocineplex.es; 5€)*. For independent films, **Filmoteca** is the place *(Avda de Sarrià 33, ☎ 93 410 75 90)*. An **IMAX** theater on the Moll d'Espanya next to Maremàgum shows mostly educational films *(☎ 93 225 11 11, www.imaxintegral.com; 7€).*

> **TIP:** For a listing of showtimes and movie theaters in Barcelona, consult the ***Guía del Ocio***, available at all newsstands and most supermarkets for .90€, or on the Internet at www.guiadelociobcn.es. In the guide and at theaters, a movie title followed by 'V.O. subtitulada' means that it is shown in its original language with Spanish subtitles.

Live Music

Barcelona has a well-deserved reputation for great live jazz music and plenty of venues to enjoy it. The scene got started when the 1929 Universal Exhibition brought with it popular English and American jazz bands and the city liked what it heard. In the

1950s, **Jamboree** was the first bar opened to host live jazz on a weekly basis and the reputation has spread since. For every known American jazz player that comes to play the city, there is a local boy around to hold his own, such as Llibert Fortuny, Marc Ayza or Jordi Farrés.

From late October to early December, the city hosts the **Festival Internacional de Jazz**, with nightly performances at the Palau de la Música and the Luz de Gas *(Carrer Muntaner 246, ☎ 93 209 77 11)*. The rest of the year you can catch nightly shows around 11 pm at the **Harlem Jazz Club** *(C/ Comtessa de Sobradiel 8, ☎ 93 310 07 55; M: Jaume I; 5€)* and **Jamboree** *(Placa Reial 17, ☎ 93 319 17 89)*. The Monday night **WTF** (What the___) jam session is a sight to see *(Placa Reial 17, ☎ 93 301 75 64, 7-10€)*. Other bars around town that specialize in jazz include **La Cova del Drac** (Club de Jazz Vallmajor 33, ☎ 93 200 70 32), **Bel.luna** *(Rambla Catalunya 5, ☎ 93 302 22 21)*, **Dos Trece** *(C/ Carme 40)* and **Luz de Gas** *(C/ Muntaner 246, ☎ 93 209 77 11)*.

The Beach & Booze

During the summertime the beach bars (*chiringuitos*) open up on the Platja Nova Icària and Bogatell. On any given year there will be five or six of these bars, each with a different style and a DJ spinning anything from euphoric ambient house music to reggae. Some, like **Dockers**, set out low wooden tables in the sand, light a candle on them and expect you to spread yourself beneath the moon and relax. **Deseo** lights sand torches around rows of comfortable lounge chairs. There are tables as well, but the sand is so much more comfortable and the real reason these places are worth the hike. You can follow the beach promenade from the Port Vell past the Port Olímpic to reach the bars, or flag a taxi for *'los chiringuitos de Bogatell.'*

Bars

The first bar stop should be at one of the city's infamous ***cava* bars**, or *xampanyerias*. Cataluñua's champagne (*cava*) is the best you'll find anywhere in Spain, made in wineries scattered around the village of Sant Sadurní d'Anoia outside of Barcelona using French champagne methods. The stuff is cheap and guaranteed to get the night started off right.

The liveliest *cava* bar in town is **Xampanyería** *(Carrer de la Reina Cristina 7)*, a few blocks off the Port Vell. Expect crowds overflowing in the streets and elbow-rubbing good times. A bottle of *cava* costs 1.50€ with the purchase of a *tapa*. The choices are listed on a chalkboard behind the wall. You'll most likely have to shout to get your order heard (a tip – go to the middle-aged man at the center of the bar; he's the most efficient). During the day you can pick up bottles at the store in the rear of the bar for 1€. By nighttime the shop closes down and the crowds take over. Get there early to beat the rush and the last call, which is at 10 pm. You'll see fewer tourists at **El Xampanyet**, a *sidrería* and *cava* bar near the Picasso Museum in El Born. Here you can ac-

tually sit down and enjoy your drink and a wide selection of *tapas*. Anchovies in vinaigrette seem to go well with the bubbly *(Carrer de Montcada 22)*.

While in El Born, check out a very local spot, **Bar Ribborn**, a funky conversationalists' dive lit by glowing red balls. It is the epitome of Born cool *(Carrer Antic de Sant Joan 3)*. New on the Born scene is **La Fiana**, a large cocktail bar tastefully decorated in a stylish blend of Oriental and Andalucían, with plenty of secluded niches to get intimate. Here you kick back on king-size velvet cushions and wait for the waitress to set your drinks down on a silver tray *(C/ Banys Vells 15, ☎ 93 315 18 10)*.

Miramelindo is an inconspicuous place with no sign outside, but you'll see the small yellow stenciling when the 300-year-old (and -pound) door is opened for the night on this sophisticated lounge. Upstairs or down, it is an evocative setting with cushy chairs around large round tables and the music and lights turned down low. Cocktails are pricey *(Passeig del Born 15)*.

The Starvin Bar, formerly the Temporary Bar, needs to come up with a better angle. There are DJs on the weekend and classic movies in English during the evenings, but not all that many folks. Think of it as an Irish bar with trendy décor and no television *(C/ Princesa 23, ☎ 93 268 34 52)*.

Around the Placa Reial, there are a few good choices – some of them hidden to avoid the tourist crush, but since exposed by ruthless travel guide writers. One of these is the suave **Barcelona Pipa Club**. Your chances of getting in are pretty good if: you dress up, not down; treat the quick-tempered doorman with respect; and bring some pretty señores or señoritas along. Maybe pick up a Cohiba stogie at one of the *tabacs* en route. Upstairs there are couches, pricey drinks, a pool table and usually a section that is cordoned off for the real pipe smokers *(Placa Reial 3)*. Downstairs, **Bar Glacier** has been around for a long time, but has nothing special to show for it. The bar serves *tapas* and has tables in the plaza. Sangria here is very weak and expensive *(Placa Reial)*.

A good place to shoot some pool, drink a cold one and socialize with a mix of locals and out-of-towners while looking down on the plaza is the hippiefied **Bar Penya Central**. It's located upstairs above the restaurant Les Quince Nits. To get in, around the left side of the restaurant to Passeig de Madozand ring the bell to the door just past the last dinner tables. Upstairs Havana, Cuba doesn't seem so far away.

The Travel Bar, as its name might suggest, is frequented by out-of-towners. It's a good place to be loud, drink schooners and meet new faces. The place has Internet access and a large terrace out back *(C/ Boqueria 27, Placeta del Pi)*. **Margarita Blue** has nightly DJs and a live trapeze act and magic show on Mon. through Wed. You'll have a hard time finding another place in Spain that serves fried green tomatoes, the Southern specialty *(C/ J. Anselm Clavé 6)*.

Bar Almirall is reputed to be the oldest bar in Barcelona, once frequented by Van Gogh, Monet and Picasso for its absinth – these days frequented for its absynth and jazz *(C/ Joaquim Costa 33)*.

Along Port Vell, the **Fastnet** is an Irish bar that doesn't have the clichéd décor and typically bad food. Shane, its owner, has been around the city since he helped build the Port Olímpic for the 1992 Olympic Games. The salty breeze got in his head and he decided that, rather than make his place dark and drab, he'd outfit it with an eye to the sea; the local boatmen have since

made it their hangout. But, as in any good Irish bar, the music gets turned down when a good football, cricket or rugby game comes on the tube. This is the only real bar on the main pedestrian strip to the beach and its terrace tables are a great place to watch the pretty people go by. The salmon salad is good, but the chicken special is great. *(Passeig de Joan de Borbó 22, ☎ 93 295 20 05).*

A few blocks into Barceloneta, **La Múcura** was opened up by two young and likable Venezuelans, Alex and Alex. It's a small corner bar with a few tables outside, good ceviche, *cuba libra* drinks and homemade flan *(C/ de Ginebra 20, ☎ 93 310 09 18).*

Clubs

Barcelona's disco scene is as righteous as anywhere in Spain and a little more liberated. Options abound and nice dress shoes aren't always a requirement as the laid-back beach atmosphere seems to have rubbed off on the door guys. Covers are usually around 20€ and you won't want to bother going until 1:30 am at the earliest. Keep an eye out for flyers around town offering discounted entry fees.

In the heart of the city, a small but well-known club is **Moog**, just off Las Ramblas. Past the long bar the downstairs dance floor is headed by a DJ spinning a mix of techno and electronica. The stuffy upstairs dance floor is all about cheesy '70s and '80s hits. Open every night from 11:30 pm *(Arc del Teatre 3)*.

Republica has two dance floors wrapped by an elevated show-off ledge, a lounge and keeps a good roster of DJs on the deck. House music, new techno and drum and bass are nightly affairs *(Avda Marquès D'Argentera)*. **City Hall** is a theater by day, reputed draw of top-notch DJs by night. A young, ultra-hyped crowd dances to rap, hip-hop, trance, soul, house and drum-n-bass *(Rambla Catalunya 4).*

La Terraza is a breezy open-air disco in the Poble Espanyol with Salvador Dalí recreations hanging from the walls and an outdoor patio on which to recover, momentarily. Walking through the new-old streets of the Poble Espanyol adds a special touch to this special place. Yada, Yada, Yada. The music is house, house-techno and funky pop. Guest DJs occasionally include Roger Sanches *(Poble Espanyol, Avda Marqués de Commilas s/n).*

Jamboree is all about jazz in the early evening and disco from the midnight hour on. This cavernous club goes off, particularly on Mon. nights *(Placa Reial 17)*. **Danzatoria** has two options. The first is in the Port Olímpic, the second is a long taxi drive out to Mont Tibidabo. If you want to do the disco thing but can't stand the thought of staying out until the sun comes up, either is a good choice since the music stops around 3:30 am *(Avda Tibidabo 61 on Mont Tibidabo and C/ Ramon Trias Fargas 24 in the Port Olímpic).*

Pacha is well known to European club goers, most notably for its Ibiza wing. World class DJs come to play regularly. On a good night they'll pack 2,000 people inside this giant club with six bars and an outdoor terrace. Resident DJs spin house, latinhouse, deephouse (a heavier, slower and, some say, more soulful version), techno and garage beats. You'll have to catch a cab, as the club's located north of town by the FC Barcelona stadium. Open Fri. and Sat. from midnight until 6 am *(Avda Gregorio Marañon 17).*

■ Shopping

Several department stores, including El Corte Inglés and FNAC, are situated around the Placa de Catalunya. **El Corte Inglés** carries all the standard items you can find in your own shopping malls, albeit on a smaller scale and with a supermarket downstairs (a very upscale Wal-Mart someone once called it). **FNAC** sells high-end **electronics** and has one of the two best selections of English-language **books** in town. For an even larger selection of books, walk six blocks up the Passeig de Gràcia from the Placa de Catalunya to reach the **Casa del Libros** *(Passeig de Gràcia 62)* on the right. Many of Spain's **top fashion** designers have boutiques along the Passeig de Gràcia as well, including **Adolfo Dominguez** *(Passeig de Gràcia 32)* and **Josep Font** *(Passeig de Gràcia 106).*

The city's two largest **shopping malls** are on Avda Diagonal, the more fashionable **L'Illa** *(Avda Diagonal 545)* and the enormous **Barcelona Glories** with over 200 shops and a theater (Avda Diagonal 208).

At the opposite corner of the Plaza de Catalunya the pedestrian street Avda Portal de l'Ángel is lined with **commercial clothing** stores like **Zara** and **Pull and Bear** (similar to Gap and Old Navy).

Antique stores are common on the Carrer de la Palla and Carrer Banys Nous in the Barri Gòtic and on the Carrer de Cent in Eixample. There is also a large antique mall on the Passeig de Gràcia, **Boulevard dels Antiquaris** *(Passieg de Gràcia 55)*. On Thursdays a small antique market is staged in front of the Catedral, with plenty of old cameras, postcards and coinage. On a good day you may come across some antiques at the **Mercat de les Encants**, the city's largest **flea market**, held in the Placa de las Glòries (Metro Glories). It's open from around 9 am-7 pm Mon., Wed., Fri. and Sat. On these same days there is a smaller flea market outside the Boquería and a used book seller there on Sundays. Also on Sundays the Placa Reial is the site of a coin and stamp market.

Art galleries are scattered throughout town, though you'll find a great many of them in the neighborhood of El Born, particularly along Carrer de Montcada.

■ Where to Stay

Barri Gòtic

The classic lines, subtle elegance and soundproofing make the **Gran Hotel Barcino** a welcome escape from the frenetic pace of the street just outside its revolving glass doors. Blue is the predominant color of the hotel's interior. Shrinks equate blue with tranquility and order, the seas and royalty. Painting a room blue creates a soothing, tension-free space said to produce calming chemicals in the body (which we could all use a good dose of after a summertime walk through Barcelona). Studies have even shown that weightlifters are able to lift heavier weights in blue gyms. What they haven't shown is whether

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

psychobabble is relevant in choosing a hotel for the night. And, in fact, the Gran Hotel Barcino's guest quarters are furnished with dark green linens and draperies, the color of wealth, masculinity and, coincidentally, fertility. So the elegant Gran Hotel Barcino is a perfect choice for any guests who are overworked, living beyond their means or trying to have a baby. *(Jaume I 6, ☎ 93 302 20 12, fax 93 301 42 42, www.gargallohotels.es; d 206€.)*

Not quite as stimulating is ☆☆☆ **Hotel Suizo** in an early 20th-century edifice facing the busy Vía Laietana between the Barri Gótic and El Born. The hotel has been recently redecorated at the hands of an apparently hapless aesthete. The result is an impersonal atmosphere underscored by bland rooms that, in truth, lack nothing but the ability to enhance a trip to Barcelona. Each has hardwood floors, television, private bath and a mini-bar. *(Placa de l'Angel 12, ☎ 93 310 61 08, fax 93 315 04 61, d 123€.)*

A lovely Neoclassical courtyard with its original wide marble staircase is the centerpiece of the **Hotel Catalonia Albinoni**, on the bustling pedestrian shopping zone between the Placa Catalunya and the Catedral. While the 19th-century palace retains little else from this epoch, guests who have never stayed in an evocative Spanish *parador* before may find the cheery modern confines more than satisfactory. Rooms characterized by cherry wood floors and red marbled bathrooms are sparse and functional rather than elegant or cozy. Those with a small balcony overlooking the shopping district are quite nice but can be a bit noisy. *(Portal d l'Àngel 17, ☎ 93 318 41 41, fax 93 301 26 31, ablinoni@hotels-catalonia.es; d 105€.)*

In Placa Reial, ☆ **Hotel Roma Reial** offers affordable low-end accommodations. The rooms are plain and simple with private bath, air conditioning and television. *(Placa Reial 11, ☎ 93 302 03 66, fax 93 301 18 39, www.todobarcelona.com/romareial; d 60€.)*

Hotel Jardí, in the lively Placa Sant Josep Oriol, looks like a thoroughly charming historical hotel on the outside. After passing through the sliding glass doors one might wonder whom, exactly, the hotel is trying to appeal to. Rooms are new, no doubt, with private bath and television, but visually sterile and devoid of any character whatsoever. Thus a dilemma: Who is willing to pay hotel prices for upscale hostel accommodations? By the looks of things, not many people. The only saving grace are the balconies of the exterior rooms, which overlook the lovely plazas below. *(Placa Sant Josep Oriol 1, ☎ 93 301 59 00, fax 93 342 57 33, hoteljardi@retemail.es; d 75-90€ with terrace.)*

Budget

Hostal Kabul in the Placa Reial is the epitome of European backpacking on a budget, the kind of place we all imagine before crossing the Atlantic that first time, with a big communal room full of long tables, a pool table, some video games, Internet portals – plus lots of energetic kids buying 1€ cans of beer from the machine and waiting for the pub crawl to start. Unfortunately, the place has been mentioned by guidebooks in at least 10 different languages and as a result fills up fast during the high season. The multi-person bunk rooms are in the back and were quite smelly three years ago. Since then, they've cleaned things up a bit and begun a slow overhaul of the place. But it is still the same place, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Kabul is all about having a good time and meeting new people – sleeping is the last prior-

ity here. The staff organizes pub crawls twice a week during the high season, which cost 15€ and begin on the roof overlooking the city, with all the beer you can handle before you're led off to chase cheap shots and the opposite sex. Even if you don't stay here, feel free to stop by. Plenty of people do. Maybe they'll have the 2€ jars of sangria. *(Placa Reial 17, ☎ 93 318 51 90, fax 93 301 40 34; s 20€)*

When **Hostal Fernando** on busy Calle Ferran was recently remodeled, someone was sharp enough to install see-through glass doors to showcase the lobby of what looks to be an uncharacteristically cool budget accommodation. While Hostal Kabul in the Placa Reial has apparently cornered the market on cool – at least as far as pub-crawling, first-time backpackers are concerned – Fernando does a steady business of customers looking to stay in a clean, furnished and half-way private setting. Socializing goes on in the television room. Upstairs rooms are basic but new, with a choice of dorm rooms or doubles, with or without private bath and TV. *(C/ Ferran 31, ☎ 93 301 79 93, fax 93 511 21 50, www.Barcelona-on-line.es/Fernando; dorm room 14€, double 36€, with bath 48€.)*

Pension Nevada is in one of the main shopping districts on a wide pedestrian avenue running through the Barri Gòtic from the Placa Catalunya to the Catedral. Part of the hostel is given over to a German family that rents out the rooms, each of which is old but well kept and furnished with a mirror and washbasin. Toilets and bath are shared, though the family has its own. *(Avda Puerta del Angel 16, ☎ 93 302 31 01, d 50€.)*

Just down the pedestrian avenue Puerta del Angel, the receptionist at **Hostal-Residencia Lausanne** is immediately likeable. When asked about the quality of his accommodations, he doesn't mince words. "I won't mislead you," he says, "*pero no son nuevas*." No, they are far from new and, after passing through the attractive entry hall and up the staircase, they might even seem disappointing. Nonetheless, budget travelers requiring little more than cleanliness should be satisfied. *(Avda Puerta del Angel 24, ☎ 93 302 11 39, d 48-65€ with bath).*

The same Spanish family that runs Pension Noya on Las Ramblas maintains **Pension Bienestar** in the Barri Gòtic. Bienestar is the better choice, cleaner and less noisy than the Las Ramblas location. Double and triple rooms have a sink, with the bathroom and shower down the hall. *(C/ Quintana 3, ☎ 93 318 72 83; d 40€.)*

Pension Vitoria is bohemian in the truest since of the word. The place is so cluttered it looks like the living room of a 55-year-old child. I wouldn't recommend this place to my demonic trashman. *(C/ La Palla 8, ☎ 93 302 08 34, d: 40€.)*

Pension Casablanca, near Port Vell between the Barri Gòtic and El Born, is run by a nice Spanish family eager to accommodate. Nothing fancy, but its rooms are clean and adequately furnished. A double with private bath runs 50€ in the high season. *(Vía Laietana 23, ☎ 93 319 30 00.)*

El Born

Appropriate to its fashionable setting, **Hotel Banys Orientals** is trendy without appearing cheap. To the contrary, the fine hotel combines urban industrialist decorum with an oriental sentimentality. The rooms are a minimalist's ideal; dark stained wood floors, white walls; understated designer

furniture of metal and hardwood with strong angles; steel four-poster beds framing simple white linens and bathroom lavatories of dark granite with oversized square porcelain sinks. For unique accommodations, this hotel is a good choice, if slightly impersonal. *(C/ Argenteria 37, ☎ 93 268 84 60, fax 93 268 84 61, www.hotelbanysorientals.com; d 89€.)* For the traditional coziness of carpeted floors and overstuffed lounge chairs, try the Gran Hotel Barcino down the street.

Gothic Point Youth Hostal in the El Born neighborhood caters to the under-20 crowd. A helpful staff and a range of activities, including pub crawls, bike rentals and guided tours, make getting out and around in Barcelona a breeze. Newly established, the hostel has nice dormitory rooms, a free Internet salon and downstairs hang-out lounge with a television. *(C/ Vigatans 5, ☎ 93 268 78 08, fax 93 246 15 52; s 21€ includes continental breakfast.)*

El Raval & Las Ramblas

Hotel Rivoli Ramblas is a smart choice on Las Ramblas for jet-setters and fashion hawks. Beyond the classical façade, the newly overhauled interior is crisp and bright, an effective blend of styles ranging from retro-deco to LA chic. The airy rooms are bathed in warm tones and complemented by walnut accents, linen draperies and slick marble bathrooms, a contrast to the jazzed-up lounge with its cool blues, stainless steel fittings and abstract decorum or the classy restaurant and bar with polished wood floors and crystal chandeliers. The upper-floor terrace with views of the city is a goodplace for a nightcap with the setting sun. *(La Rambla 128, ☎ 93 481 76 76, fax 93 317 50 53, reserves@rivolihotels.com; d 246€.)*

Across the street is the conservative **Hotel Royal**, which lends itself to the status quo of average, expected and somewhat boorish hotels the world over. The classically styled rooms are square and small, making the television controller almost unnecessary and pillow fights downright impossible. The amenities are standard fare, with full bath, television, and that all-important feature here in summer, air conditioning. A strong selling point, which the concierge likes to emphasize, is that the rooms are expertly soundproofed so as to block out the exterior as well as the potentially more disturbing interior rackets. *(La Rambla 117, ☎ 93 301 94 00, fax 93 317 31 79, www.hroyal.com.)*

As emblematic as the **Hotel Continental** has become in its 100-year existence, the place could stand for a consult by an interior decorator who doesn't equate style with nauseating gold wallpaper mated to gold floral linens, brass beds and beige carpeting. The Hotel Continental isn't out to compete with stylish luxury hotels though and, despite myself, the frank gaudiness is almost endearing after a few nights of adjustment. Since its opening in 1898, the hotel has been run by the Malagarriga family and in that time acquired a loyal following among celebs and the sentimental. The staff is friendly, which makes the prime location all the more appealing to any first-timers in Barcelona. (After that first visit, you'll likely never want to stay on the strip again.) Mention should be made of the exterior room balconies, unmistakable from the street, with the word "Continental" emblazoned on each and every one. But from the balconies you can sit and watch the action on Las Ramblas as George Orwell did during the Spanish Civil War when bullets, rather than street bands, were shattering the air. *(La Rambla 138, ☎ 93 301 25 70, fax 93 302 73 60, www.hotelcontinental.com; d 75-90€.)*

In Raval, the **Hotel Ambassador** was inaugurated in 1992 for the Olympic Games. A photograph in the lobby immortalizes its first guests, the basketball players of the unbeatable "Dream Team," led by Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and all the other pros that the USA finally unleashed to wreak havoc on world courts. It's a hotel calling card, what can I say? The hotel itself is contemporary in style with plush, even suave bedroom ensembles. Sipping cognac at the grand Modernist bar and lounging around the rooftop pool with hot tub take precedence over dining in the bland banquet-style restaurant. *(C/ Pintor Fortuny 13, ☎ 93 342 61 80, fax 93 302 79 77, reservasambassador@rivolihotels.com.)*

Budget

Hostal Residencia Noya is a no-frills roof over your head and a lumpy-pillow kind of place. For a decent night's rest, request an interior room, as opposed to the jam boxes facing Las Ramblas. Restrooms are outside the rooms, which are relatively clean. *(Rambla Canaletas 133, ☎ 93 301 48 31.)*

Pension Mont Thabor should have been brought to the attention of location scouts for *The Beach*. A trip up the stairs is just that, past the dusty windows of a ramshackle oriental shop and signs for a sex-toy store while neon lights flicker in the dim corridor. No bludgeoned bodies or secret island maps were found though, and, for fear of slandering the place, let it be said that the attendant is a man of indifference – not a bad thing for many of the travelers looking to stay on Las Ramblas. The pension offers dingy doubles and triples with shared baths not unlike the Bangkok room described by Alex Garland: "As soon as I relaxed, I began to hear the cockroaches scuttling around in other rooms." *(Las Ramblas 86, ☎ 93 317 66 66, d 40€.)*

Pension 45 occupies a corner edifice in an upstart zone of Raval near the contemporary art museum, which has been a catalyst for change in this traditionally slummy neighborhood. Of Raval hostels this is one of the more appealing options, with mock-Corinthian columns and surrounding decorum inspired, however slightly, by Mudéjar styling. Rooms vary in size, shape and amenities; no television here, but a choice of private or communal bath. Lock the deadbolt, as twice during our stay the desk attendant opened our door in the middle of the night for no apparent reason. Weird, but true. *(C/ Tallers 45, ☎ 93 302 70 61, d 35€, with bath 45€.)*

Also in Raval, **Hostal Delfos** offers singles, doubles and quads with all the charm of a hospital ward. *(Ronda San Antonio 61, ☎ 93 323 16 51, d 40€.)*

Pension Maritima is next to the wax museum near the end of Las Ramblas at Port Vell. It is a dump of a place really, but the concierge is friendly and, as he said, "What can you expect for 15€ a night?" *(Las Ramblas 4, ☎ 93 302 31 52, s 15€).*

Eixample & Gràcia

In a past life the new-old **Hotel Florida** was the favored retreat of celebrities and socialites, a secluded palace overlooking the city but seemingly a world apart in its perch on Mount Tibidabo. Originally opened in 1925, then closed in the 1970s, the hotel reopened its doors to much fanfare in 2003 after a total remake that left only the Mediterranean-style exterior looking as it had all along. Billed as the flagship of Barcelona's luxury hotels, the Florida offers 70 immaculate rooms with tall arched windows overlooking the Pyre-

nees and the Mediterranean, marble bathrooms with heated floors and flat-screen plasma TVs. A private club hosts frequent live jazz performances and its restaurant, L'Orangerie, run by award-winning chef Gérard Ferry, shouldn't have to wait long to earn its Michelin stars. The sparkling zero-edge indoor-outdoor swimming pool flows into lush gardens terraced down the side of the mountain. The city of Barcelona sprawling toward the sea far below is easily reached, but leaving the Hotel Florida behind for the day may prove more difficult. *(Carretera Vallvidrera al Tibidabo, ☎ 93 259 30 00, fax 93 259 3001, www.hotellaflorida.com; d 340€.)*

A Barcelona classic, the **Hotel Gran Vía** is located on the busy thoroughfare of the same name in the heart of the Eixample neighborhood, the erstwhile playground of the city's revered Modernisme architects. The 19th-century palace conserves its antique furniture, while the guest rooms, situated around a fanciful interior courtyard, are fully modernized and lacking only a little WD-40 on their squeaky door hinges. The head concierge is amicable, though annoyingly unwelcoming to his guests' guests. *(Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes 642, ☎ 93 318 19 00, fax 93 318 99 97, d 105€.)*

Hostal Oliva is a few blocks from the Casa Milà on the grand Modernist thoroughfare designed by Gaudí that's decorated with lampposts by his contemporary, Pere Falqués. An antique wooden elevator slowly rises through the courtyard to the fourth floor of this fine turn-of-the-20th-century building. With no public space in which to meet fellow travelers, outgoing types won't find this hostel a very sociable place or its proprietor especially fond of noisy guests. A narrow hallway leads to rooms that are simply furnished and well maintained, with the choice of private bath and television or no show and shared facilities. *(Passeig de Gràcia 32, ☎ 93 488 01 62, fax 93 487 04 97, www.lasguias.com/hostaloliva, hostaloliva@lasguias.com.)*

Barceloneta, Port Vell & Port Olímpic

Among the finer hotels in Barcelona, **Hotel Arts** occupies one of the two 153-m (500-foot) towers built overlooking the Port Olympic when the city hosted the 1992 Olympic Games. Guests arrive beneath a leafy covered throughway linking the hotel with the city's Gran Casino, shielded by a slick wall of falling water. From the lobby up, the public and private quarters are spacious and elegantly furnished in a punchy modern, Art Nouveau vain, with classical accents. Rooms at the top, along with the hotel's sky lounge, come with the highest views in Barcelona and a price to match. Among the choices are doubles, suites and the one- to three-bedroom apartments that originally housed Olympic athletes, each with shiny marble bathrooms, mini-bars, satellite television and twice-daily maid service. The hotel facilities include a fitness center, three restaurants ranging in offerings from haute Mediterranean cuisine to *tapas*, and two bars, one of which occupies an elevated garden terrace with a swimming pool overlooking Frank Gehry's goldfish sculpture and the sea. Reserve well in advance. *(Carrer de la Marina 19-21, ☎ 93 221 10 00, fax 93 221 10 70, www.ritzcarlton.com, d 310-450€).*

Hotel Oasis II is the only mid-range option near the water, situated across the Avda D'Icaria from the fisherman's quarter of Barceloneta and a straight shot on the Passeig de Joan de Borbó to the beach. The immediate surroundings are rather bland and the rooms, while furnished with television, air conditioning and private bath, are not the highest quality. But the location is arguably one of the best in town. Travelers looking for a central point from

which to explore each of the distinct zones of Barcelona will find it here: the Ports, shoreline, Las Ramblas and the Barri Gòtic are within a five-minute walk, though you'll need to stretch your legs for the 20-minute hike to Eixample. *(Placa del Palau 17, ☎ 93 319 43 96, fax 93 310 48 74.)*

Hostal del Mar, with its "Hotel" sign, often confuses tourists until they see the interior. With the exception of the historically notable edifice, there is nothing hotel about this hostel, which is actually a basic pension offering antiquated rooms with creaky beds and few perks save for obscure views of Port Vell. Showers have been installed in a few of the rooms, though most lack them, requiring a walk down the hall to one of the communal bathrooms. (Placa de Palau 19, ☎ 93 319 33 02.)

Sea Point Hostel is the budget option closest to the beach, which is across an open plaza from the front entrance. Pass through the cheap café, good for little more than crusty *bocadillos* and meeting other out-of-towners, to the reception desk in the back. Bunk-bed rooms come in the six- , seven- or eight-person variety. The 21€ per night includes free Internet access and breakfast. *(Pl. del Mar 4, ☎ 93 224 70 75, fax 93 246 15 52.)*

■ What to Eat & Where

The new generation of Barcelona artists are concerned with architecture only so far as it creates a complimentary ambiance to their creations; they are not hanging their masterpieces on walls or atop pedestals, but instead presenting them on plates in exciting new spaces in the Eixample and Born, perfectly natural settings for this latest wave of avant-garde auteurs. For a minute or less the diner may appreciate a work of art that bears all the color and radical symmetry of a Cubist canvas but which bursts with such flavor that it must be devoured to be understood.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

In Barcelona an emerging group of young nouvelle chefs is breaking with tradition, challenging expectations and drawing rave reviews as a consequence. Instead of a traditional ali-oli garlic sauce, you're more likely to find a light, fruity foam accompanying the fish of the day. Simple salt and olive oil are out, extraordinarily flavorful confits, sweet emulsions and spicy purées are in. Yet fundamental to this brazen new cuisine are the fresh ingredients that have always characterized Spanish cooking; they're just being combined in new and interesting ways for unexpected, even un-Spanish, results.

It is still possible to order the wonderful seafood *zarzuela* in Barcelona, the regional *butifarra* pork sausage dish with broad beans or the sweet *crema catalana* flan, but few other areas in Spain, with the exception of the País Vasco, allow you to exercise the taste buds like never before.

Whether because of price or preference, culinary experimentation is not for everyone and, in fact, it would be a shame to neglect the traditional Spanish cuisine available throughout Barcelona without having previously sampled it. The rebel-rousing introduction is meant only to offer an alternative to the classic 19th-century restaurants of the Barri Gótic, the tourist-oriented ter-

race restaurants of Las Ramblas or the seafood specialists abounding in Barceloneta and along the ports. With no shortage of international restaurants and cheap alternatives, going hungry in Barcelona is as difficult as going to sleep in one of its discos.

Barri Gòtic

Before the tourists, **Els Quatre Gats** was the fashionable haunt of the Barcelona bourgeoisie and the likes of Russinyol, Picasso, Gaudí and their contemporaries. Another Modernist architect, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, designed its building, known as the Casa Marti, in 1896. An indelible feature of his works, the patron St. George, is depicted on its façade. The Four Cats is a mainstay on the Barcelona scene and one that has changed little since its heyday at the turn of the 20th century. The interior is adorned with sculptures by Eusebi Arnau, Cubist paintings hang from the walls above and beneath the second floor catwalk beside new works by up-and-coming Catalan artists. The menu's cover was taken from a poster designed by Picasso, who held his first exhibition here at the age of 17. Despite a large tourist clientele, the restaurant is an original Catalan experience with a menu representative of Mediterranean cuisine, a finely dressed, professional staff and a two-piece band that looks to be having more fun than a kid in a candy store. The maitre d' even personally escorted this red wine soaked diner to have her shirt cleaned. The Four Cats offers an afternoon *menu del día* at 9.97€ and an à la carte dinner menu *($$$, Carrer Montsio 3, ☎ 93 302 41 40).*

Long lines form outside **Les Quince Nits** every night in the Placa Reial. The reason – the restaurant combines an upscale setting with a comparable menu but one that is surprisingly affordable. On the outdoor terrace or inside to the tune of a piano, one can feel like a bon vivant without having to pay the price. A representative selection of Spanish wines complements a mix of international and Spanish fare that, while not exceptional, does exceed expectations set by the menu prices. Attentive service is a consolation for the long lines. Arrive around 8:45 for the first seating or at 10:15 for the second seating to avoid a long wait *(Placa Reial 6, ☎ 93 317 30 75).*

L'Antiga Taverna Vildsvin is a moody, stylish oyster bar and restaurant on the main thoroughfare through the Barri Gòtic. In the front window a station is manned to prepare the oysters, cracked, then piled on cardboard trays and sold at 13.20€ a dozen. Folks from New Orleans may be disappointed in the size of these shellfish; better to try clams and mussels in Spain. With that in mind, Vildsvin above offers a wide selection of *tapas* as well as Hungarian goulash and marinated duck washed down with a European wine or a Czechoslovakian beer. An evocative terrace and live jazz and classical music Thurs.-Sat. round out the scene *(C/ Ferran 38, ☎ 93 317 94 07; Metro Liceu).*

Jupiter has transformed a 17th-century carriage house into a hip delicatessen and bar replete with rustic antiques and trendy decorative touches. Few places can compete with its creative sandwiches and homemade liqueurs *($$, C/ Jupi 4, ☎ 93 268 3650; Metro Jaume I).*

Los Caracoles, like the other classic establishments in the Barri Gòtic, is given over to tourists during the summertime, no doubt seduced by the outdoor spit which permeates the air for blocks with the smell of roasting chicken. Fitting its name, the restaurant serves snails and, in fact, snails are everywhere – in pictures, engraved on banisters, even rolls come out shaped

like them. Since its opening in the 19th century, Los Caracoles has amassed quite an impressive collection of photographs. Hemingway, Dietrich and Juan Carlos are among its distinguished patrons of yesteryear. 9€ will buy a half of that juicy, golden brown chicken that looked so delicious outside *($$, C/ Escudellers 14, ☎ 93 419 07 35).*

El Born

Harmonizing traditional Catalan cuisine with the vanguard has become the priority of **Santa Maria** chef and owner Paco Guzman. The rustic, almost cavernous setting has the feel of a primitive Andalucian home in Granada's Gypsy enclave, the *Sacromonte*, but with more symmetry and color. It is not an exclusive setting, but one where young and old can sample *tapas*, dine on a traditional Spanish meal, or have something completely different, without maxing the credit card. Guzman serves the traditional *butifarra* dish of sausage and white beans, but, rather than pork, the sausage may be filled with duck and flavored by oranges. *Tapas* may come the old fashioned way, with the anchovies on toasted bread smeared with puréed tomato, or as a sushi of trout eggs and avocado. Grilled shark and rare tuna steak in a lime and soy sauce are often mated with wild mushrooms or asparagus, two Catalan favorites. Desserts range from a piña colada chupa-chup treat (these round suckers are for sale everywhere) or a rice pudding with cinammon ice cream *($$$, Carrer Comerc 17, ☎ 93 315 12 27).*

Barcelona didn't always have País Vasco *pintxo* (Basque *tapas*) bars and restaurants on every corner. It all began with **Euskal Etxea** on Carrer Montcada in El Born, an upscale restaurant run by chefs from the País Vasco, Spain's land of culinary intrigue. When it became clear that Euskal Etxea was doing a great business, others began to take notice, bars and restaurants with that tell-tale 'tx' in their name became as commonplace as *geladerías*. And somewhere along the way, the two chefs who started the first of these restaurants, both long-time friends, had a falling out. Shouts during their final dispute were said to have been heard four floors up and two blocks away. The partners split on bad terms and one moved two doors down where he opened his own restaurant and, to spite his old friend, named it **Nou Euskal Etxea**. Both are fine restaurants with ironically similar ambiance and offerings (though the latter is slightly more upscale), such as spring veggies, red peppers stuffed with cod, baked monkfish or turbot in garlic vinaigrette, seared tuna with tomato compote, roast suckling lamb, fruit soup with lemon and mint sorbet. Moreover, prices are comparable at 15-25€ a main course and both serve a delicious selection of País Vasco *tapas*, called *pinchos*. *(Placeta Montcada 1 & 3, ☎ 93 310 21 85.)*

Nouvelle cuisine is the stock and trade of chef Cares Abellán at his fun **Comerc 24**. An industrial décor with high tables and barstools lends itself to a casual evening of sampling *tapas* or feasting on the more unorthodox choices of his dinner menu – for starters, asparagus topped with mayonnaise foam; a main course of saffron risotto with parmesan and tripe or a lamb skewer with a mint emulsion, capped off by a delicate French toast with vanilla foam. *($$$, C/ Comerc 24, ☎ 93 319 21 02.)*

The first Cuban restaurant on the scene in Barcelona, **Habana Vieja** pairs an eclectic, homely ambiance with representative cuisine from the island. Without reservations, the wait can be whiled away staring at the black and white celebrity photographs on the walls with a *mojito*, Hemingway's favor-

ite drink, in hand. While some of the personalities shown actually dined in the restaurant, others, like Hemingway and Castro, never managed to. Rice and black beans are paramount among the offerings, along with minced meats, roast pork and the *tosajo*, or horse meat. *($$, Carrer dels Banys Valls 2, ☎ 93 268 25 04; Metro Jaume I.)*

A romantic, candlelit dinner can be had at **La Flauta Magica**, a small bistro on a quiet Born side street with a predilection toward vegetarian fare and euphoric ambient house music. The healthy cuisine is a fusion of Indian, Caribbean, and Thai cooking. *(C/ Banys Vells 18, ☎ 93 268 46 94; Metro Jaume I.)*

The self-service **Marisqueria** behind the shuttered Mercat del Born makes it possible to choose your own seafood from the icy trays and have it cooked as you please. It's a holdover from the days when the market was as packed with fresh seafood as the Boqueria market off Las Ramblas is today. The atmosphere, however, leaves something to be desired, with bright lighting, cheap linoleum and square aluminum tables. On the upside, the food is fresh and affordable *(Carrer Comercial)*.

Raval & Las Ramblas

The **Ra** concept seems to work. Create a hip terrace-only restaurant, bring in local DJs for nightly spinning sessions and serve creative dishes tailored to health conscious diners. The epitome of Barcelona chic, Ra is just one of the reasons that the Raval neighborhood is coming on strong. Located behind the Boquería, the bar and terrace restaurant serves breakfast, a lunch menu of the day for 8.50€ and an à la carte dinner menu. The offerings – a surfeit of salads along with risottos, *fideaus* (a pasta version of *paella*), vegetable lasagna, baked turkey in pineapple chutney, pistachio mousse and strawberry sorbet – are secondary to the scene. Reservations are usually needed. *($$$, Placa Gardunya, C/ Carme 31, ☎ 61 595 98 72, www.ratown.com.)*

Restaurant and lounge **Lupino** next door brings the trendiest of West Coast styling to Spain in an intimate setting. While the terrace tables are nice, choose a table inside or a seat at the cocktail bar to experience urban design gone mad – a futuristic catwalk, revolving wall lights that change colors from greens to blues to reds and more mirrors than a Mexican brothel. An up-and-coming Catalan chef is the inspiration behind the Mediterranean fusion cuisine served in this overly ambitious retro-nouveau establishment. *($$$$, Placa Gardunya, C/ Carme 33, ☎ 93 412 36 97.)*

Amaya on Las Ramblas is typical of traditional Catalan eateries and frequented by tourists who have no doubt heard that it is the oldest restaurant in the city. The terrace tables on Las Ramblas make for good people watching while dining on seafood, paella and other standard dishes. *($$$, Las Ramblas 20-24, ☎ 93 302 10 37; Metro Drassanes.)*

Fonda Espanya, in the hotel designed by leading Modernist architect Domech i Montaner, is a prerequisite stop if exploring the city's Moderniste architecture, though the food is not as avant-garde as the building itself. The restaurant's three *comedors* are adorned with sculpted works by Eusebi Arnau and beautiful seascapes by Ramón Casas that create the feeling of floating at sea. A menu dominated by seafood fits the mood. *($$$, C/ Sant Pau 9-11, ☎ 93 318 17 58; Metro Liceu.)*

Comida sin bestias (meals without meat) is the motto of **Sesamo**, a creative organic vegeterian restuarant near the Boqueria in Raval. Lit by festive col-

ors, retro globe lamps and the sounds of cool jazz, Sesamo debunks the idea that health food is a bland enterprise. The 8€ *menu del día* includes a glass of freshly squeezed juice, home-baked bread, and three main courses that could include rice and vegetable croquettes or a slice of leek and broccoli quiche. For dessert try the coconut tart. *(C/ St. Antoni Abat 52, ☎ 93 441 64 11; Metro St. Antoni.)*

In the Boqueria, **Kiosko Universal** is where the locals come to eat a quick, fresh bite before the afternoon siesta. The place is little more than a stall like the others around it, but with a few tall tables, bar stools and a fiery grill that makes for a fun and affordable experience. The fresh choices are lined up on ice in a glass showcase running the length of the bar: squid, gambas, calamaris, a variety of fish filets and some choice cuts of beef. Individual prices are written in chalk behind the four scrambling cooks or you can opt for the menu of the day at 8.50€, which includes a drink, starter, main course and dessert. To get there, after entering the Boqueria from Las Ramblas, make the first left.

Eixample

Part classic car showcase, part fine dining, **La Cupola** finds itself in a unique position among Barcelona restaurants. While the almost 200 wines are of note, and the cuisine – regional specialties from across Spain with a few gastronomic twists for added flavor – generally exceptional, it is the 1920s Hispana Suiza cars spaced between the tables that really set La Cupola apart. Said to be the largest collection of its kind in the country, La Cupola's cars make a day at the races seem old hat and a night out at any other restaurant seem, well, normal. An emphasis on roast meats such as the veal tenderloin in cider and a sampling of grilled seafood characterize the menu. *(C/ Sicília 255, ☎ 93 208 20 51; Metro Sagrada Familia.)*

Innovative nouvelle chef Jordi Vila, at the tender age of 29, has created in the minimalist spaces of **Alkimia** a wild foray into the netherworld of Spanish cuisine. Standard gazpacho in his hands becomes a tart apple gazpacho floating tender oysters. Grilled dorado is topped with a *romesco* sauce, traditionally a blend of sweet peppers and tomatoes, but here infused with fresh strawberries. One can be certain that by the time the dessert list is passed around it will be something like a hot hazlenut tart with apricots in a Muscatel wine sauce or perhaps an egg yolk ice cream with caviar. The less adventurous needn't feel left out; the restaurant offers a choice of traditional Spanish fare, namely roast kid and grilled fish with olive oil and salt. To test the bounds, try the four-course tasting menu. *(C/ Indústria 79, ☎ 93 207 61 15.)*

The young chefs are making **Jean Luc Figueras**, chef and owner of the like-named restaurant, seem like the elder statesman. For years he has made a name for himself by cooking up modern, creative cuisine before most people were taking notice. His restaurant, in an attractive chalet, is known for such staples as oyster salad with coconut sauce, for a rich selection of cheese and wines and for delicious desserts, not the least of which is the chocolate pastry with spiced bread ice cream. *($$$$, C/ Santa Teresa 10, ☎ 93 415 28 77.)*

Today a restaurant, **Casa Calvet** was originally designed by Gaudí for a wealthy textile manufacturer and critiqued as the most conventional of the

architect's creations. On the ground floor the office space of the former textile business creates an elegant dining experience. Catalan cuisine is reinterpreted through the smoked foie gras with mango chutney, the cold pea soup with squid or the risotto with fish meatballs. Desserts are further out and the wine list is exhaustive. Make reservations. *($$$$$, C/ Casp 48, ☎ 93 412 40 12; Metro Urquinaona.)*

Euro-Asian cuisine is the business of **Mandalay Café**, a spacious, almost warehouse-like space where it is not only OK, but appropriate to eat in bed. Don't mind the trapeze artist flitting through the air; it's all part of the entertainment concept. While the novelty of this restaurant seems to have worn thin as the number of empty beds increased, the food stands on its own merit. Among the options are tender veal kabobs, a chicken teriyaki bowl with spicy humus or mouth-watering tuna tataki. It's a very relaxed setting with overly attentive service. It would appear that reservations are unnecessary these days. *(C/ Provenza 330, ☎ 93 458 60 17, www.mandalaycafe.net.)*

Barceloneta & Ports

A pass by **La Gavina** is inevitable in a walk from Las Ramblas to the beach. The upscale, tourist-oriented restaurant claims a vast expanse of terrace tables in front of the Museu d'Historia de Catalunya with privileged views of the Port Vell and its multimillion-dollar fleet. Prices, while inflated for obvious reason, are not wholly unreasonable. Swordfish, grilled tuna, monkfish tails in garlic sauce, lobster, prawns, veal steak or *fideuás* can each be had for under 20€. *($$-$$$, Placa Pau Vila 1, ☎ 93 221 20 41; Metro Barceloneta.)*

The friendly staff of **Cheriff**, on a quiet street in El Born, sees to their small 10-table dining room with pride. Pull out a cigarrette and the host will have appeared with lighter in hand before it's in your mouth. Portholes, seaman knots, brass and varnish wood adorn the room, making seafood the obvious, the only choice. Order *paella* and it will be presented for your approval before it hits the table. Within minutes the owner will have stopped by to ask, "*todo contento?"* And yes, it is all good and affordable and away from the tourist crowd. *($$, C/ Ginebra 15, ☎ 93 319 69 84.)*

Nou Can Tipa on the pedestrian way to the beach has been open since 1886. Inside, colorful tile mosaics and wrought iron evoke the Modernist styling favored during that period. There are terrace tables outside and a friendly English-speaking waiter named Oscar who recommends, without fail, the garlic monkfish or the seafood *paella*. *(Passeig Joan de Borbó 6, ☎ 93 310 13 62; metro Barceloneta.)*

El Rey de las Gambas serves a mix of Spaniards and international out-of-towners but few locals in its location on the main strip to the beach. Maybe the fault lies with Modesto, the drunken, happy host trying to convince passersby to grab a table at the large patio terrace. One look at the *parillada*, an enormous platter of grilled squid, *mejillones* (clams), cod, seabass and, of course, *gambas*, and many who know of no other option take the man up on his offer. The *pulpo gallego* (octopus beaten to soften it, then sliced, baked and doused in olive oil, salt and paprika) is a good choice on most nights, tender and not too heavy on the sodium. The same goes for the *paella*, rich with saffron, loaded with seafood and baked to perfection; it's available for just one person, unlike in many restaurants. Despite the cheesy

look of the place it serves some of the best seafood around. *($$$, Passeig de Joan de Borbó 22.)*

Cap sa Sal is an Andalucian-styled restaurant near the beach serving traditional Spanish cuisine with an emphasis on seafood. A 15€ menu of the day includes such choices as gazpacho, clams, sea bass, salmon and melon pearls or Catalan custard for desert.

Restaurante Salamanca is the seafood restaurant par excellence of Barceloneta, with indoor or outdoor seating at a terrace, and views of the beach. Guests often opt for the *parillada* (a platter heaped with either fried or grilled monkfish, hake, cuttlefish, prawns, clams, mussles and squid) or the *pica pica*, with fried fish, baby squid and calamari. Atkins devotees could try the *cabrito*, or roast kid. *($$$, C / Almirante Cervera 34, ☎ 93 221 50 33.)*

Restaurante Monchos on the promenade of Playa Nova Icària has the cheap, seaside look of a summertime *chiringuito*. As with the majority of restaurants along the water, its specialty is seafood. The 10€ menu of the day includes the standard choices, a seafood salad, fried calamari, *paella* or cod, along with an ice cream or *crema catalana* flan for dessert. *(Ronda Litoral 36, ☎ 93 221 14 01.)*

Tapas & Cheap Eats

Next to the Museu d'Historia de Catalunya, **Luz de Gaz** serves *tapas* and cocktails and on a double-decker boat anchored to the wharf of Port Vell. Tourists seem to find it a very romantic setting, what with the lapping water, candle-lit tables and fancier boats all around. The boat offers a wide selection of *tapas* at around 5€ apiece. Some to try are the olives stuffed with anchovies, quail in soy sauce, smoked salmon and prawns in white wine and garlic sauce. *(Moll del Dipòsit.)*

Tiriñuelo is a small affair in El Born, usually standing-room-only. The roughhewn wood bar top is lined from one end to the other with *tapas* specialties of the País Vasco and the chef seems to take particular pride in their presentation. The mushrooms in olive oil are delicious, as is the cod, lightly fried and nestled in a sweet pepper and olive oil sauce. *Pinchos*, small slices of bread topped with everything from tuna to quince to mozzarella and anchovies, are at the far end of the bar. Ask for a plate and a glass of bubbly Txakoli white wine from the region, then help yourself. *(Passeig del Born 12.)*

Tapa Tapa is the perfect place for a first-timer at this wonderful culinary tradition in Spain. Two long bars present the most common *tapas* found throughout the country, among them meat stews, croquettes, *chipirones*, anchovies and a variety of cold salads. The loud American music can be nerve-wracking. *(Passeig de Gràcia 44, ☎ 93 488 33 69.)*

Taller de Tapas, in the lovely Placa Sant Josep Oriol of the Barri Gòtic, is capitalizing on the *tapas* craze. While the corporatized concept may be off-putting, the extensive selection of *tapas* and the chance to enjoy the plaza from a terrace table make amends. A place named "The *Tapas* Factory" wouldn't survive if it put out an inferior product. *(Placa Sant Josep Oriol 9, ☎ 93 301 80 20, www.tallerdetapas.com.)*

At the end of the fancy antique street of the Barri Gòtic, the Xarcuteria offers *tapas*, designer sandwiches, wines and more, in a classy, luminous setting. The downstairs seating can be refreshingly solitary. *(Carrer de la Palla 17, ☎ 93 301 19 90).*

Happy Sandwich and Friends serves a variety of cold salads and the house specialty, rolled and baked sandwiches, in a trendy spot next to the Mercat del Born. Each costs between 4€ and 5€. *(Passeig del Born 27.)*

Maoz Falafels are everywhere in the city, serving the Middle Eastern chick pea specialty fresh out of the fryer in a white or whole wheat pita. Fill it yourself at the vegetable and sauce bar.

Restaurante Dionisos, across from the Parc de la Ciudadella, offers Greek food. The platter with a lamb gyro and spanikopita is affordable and filling (5€). Chase it down with a shot of uzo. *(Marqués de l'Argentera 27, ☎ 93 268 24 71, www.dionisis-es.com.)*

Cafés

Textile Café, across the narrow street from the Picasso Museum and through an arched portal, offers outdoor seating in the secluded courtyard of a 17th-century palace. Along with coffee, the café serves a selection of salads and *tapas*. On Sunday evenings a brass band plays *(C/ de Montcada 12 93 268 25 98, www.textilcafe.com)*.

Librería Café Idea is three floors of antiques, exotic masks, Victorian couches and long tressle tables perfect for reading one of the books off the shelves or the free international newspapers and magazines, browsing at the Internet portals or sipping coffee, herbal teas or fruit smoothies with a pastry *(Placa Comerca 2, ☎ 93 268 87 87; M: Jaume I)*.

Café de L'Ópera sees too many Ramblas stragglers and harried tourists to retain the elegance it must have had during the 1920s when polished patrons of the Gran Teatre Liceo crowded inside after opera performances. Still, the Neoclassical lines and period artwork are worth a peek. The café serves *tapas*, breakfast, lunch and dinner at inflated prices both inside and outside at the patio tables on Las Ramblas *(Rambla dels Caputxins 74, ☎ 93 317 75 85)*.

Buenas Migas is a small local chain with a chipper atmosphere where fruit smoothies, coffee creations and baked focaccia imported from Italy are the mainstays. The best of the three locations is next to the Placa del Rei behind the Cathedral *(Baixada de Santa Clara 2, ☎ 93 319 13 80, www.buenasmigas.com)*.

Café di Fiorre in El Born had an intellectual crowd, deep, comfortable lounge chairs, good beats and a trendy, modern décor complementing ancient stone archways and walls. Then it was abruptly closed down for renovations in peak season and what will become of it remains to be seen. If it is an improvement on the old, don't hesitate to stop by and have an iced coffee and a crisp green salad with tomatoes, tuna, mozarella, hardboiled eggs and asparagus *(Carrer de Argenteria)*.

Small and intimate **Pangea Café** rarely sees a tourist. While not shabby, there is a bohemian air to the place that seems to attract artists from Born still in their paint-splotched coveralls – tropical décor is a little droopy and brittle, couches stylishly tattered. Fine for a respite from it all and a glass of tea, a smoothie or pitas *(Carrer dels Banys Nous 4)*.

Sweet Endings

Espai Sucre is a new and thoroughly delicious dining concept in El Born. The name means "sugar space" and the house logo is, appropriately, an ant.

This dessert restaurant was opened up two years ago by the creative chef Jordi Butrón. He doesn't whip up typical desserts like *crema catalana*, but instead makes previously unheard-of sweets like a cold tea soup with spiced ice cream and tropical fruits or coffee-infused yogurt with chocolate whiskey cake. A dinner of desserts may sound like artery-clogging indulgence, but the offerings here are not overly heavy and many are healthier than a real meal. *(C/ Princesa 53, ☎ 93 268 16 30.)*

E and A Gispert is an old-fashioned sweet shop that's been around in El Born since 1851. Worn wooden shelves are lined with gourmet goodies – fresh cinnamon, exotic coffee, pasta and delicious homemade ice cream – awaits at the exit. You can't miss the walnut stand outside. *(C/ Sombrerers 23, ☎ 93 319 75 35, www.casagispert.com.)*

After sampling *gelato* throughout the city, the art deco-styled **Gelateria Italiana** seems to offer the best. Chunks of mango and strawberry have not been puréed to oblivion and there is a subtle iciness to this cream that is like flakes of heaven on the tongue. *(Carrer de Ferran.)*

Excursions from Barcelona

"Gent de Camp, gent de lamp."

("People from the country, quick-tempered people.")

Catalan saying

■ Montserrat

"Man will not find repose, but in his own Montserrat."

J.W. von Goethe

The spiritual soul of Cataluña is 40 km (24 miles) northwest of Barcelona up a winding road that at turns reveals the weirdest rock outcropping this side of Mars. The serrated profile of Montserrat extends suddenly and unexpectedly above the landscape in a mass of shear, grayish red, barren vertical peaks, the result of uplift that left it prone to erosion when the sea receded some 10 million years ago. Nestled within this freak of nature is its monastery, the product of a legend over 1,000 years old that has since inspired pious Catholics to make it a frequent pilgrimage sight. According to the legend, 50 years after the birth of Christ, Saint Peter hid an image of the Black Virgin (*La Moreneta*) carved by Saint Luke in a Montserrat cave. The image was not rediscovered until 880, when celestial visions attracted a shepherd to the sight. The prerequisite miracles ensued and in short order a chapel had been built, followed by the construction of a Benedictine monastery in 976. Of course there are other legends, the most popular of which holds that the knight Parsifal discovered the Holy Grail in the mountain's spindly confines.

The site has long been a religious lodestar for Spaniards. In terms of the sheer numbers of faithful who come to visit it each year, it is only eclipsed by Santiago de Compostela. During the conquest of the New World, numerous South and Central American churches were named for the Virgin, who, in 1881, would become the patron saint of Cataluña. It comes as little surprise that Gaudí, an architect known for incorporating the symbolism of nature and religion in his works, found in Montserrat the perfect inspiration for his masterpiece *La Sagrada Familia*.

Useful Information

The Montserrat complex has a very average restaurant as well as a bar and cafeteria. Consider packing a picnic if you plan to hike around the peaks; en route, swing by the food stands to try the monastery's *mató* curd cheese and eucalyptus honey along with a variety of fruits and vegetables.

There are two hotels on the grounds, though reservations will be necessary in the summer. The recently renovated ☆☆☆ **Hotel Abat Cisneros** offers simple but comfortable rooms with private bath and television. The hotel restaurant is preferable to the one next to the tourist office. A double jumps from 45€ to 82€ during the high season. *(☎ 93 835 02 01, fax 93 828 40 06, reserves@larsa-montserrat.com.)*

The **Hotel Residencia Monestir** is a cheaper alternative next door. *(☎ 93 835 02 01, fax 93 828 40 06, reserves@larsa-montserrat.com.)*

Getting Here

By Train: The coolest way to come from Barcelona is via the train and cable car. Trains depart for Manresa beneath Placa d'Espanya daily from 7 am to 7 pm every two hours. It is an hour ride to Manresa, from where you'll catch the scenic, though potentially nausea-inducing cable car for a quick jaunt up to the monastery. *(Teleferic de Montserrat Aeri, every 15 min., Mon.-Sat. 10 am-5:45 pm, Sun. 10 am-6:45 pm.)*

By Bus: Buses from Barcelona are run by **Julia Tours** *(☎ 933 18 38 95)*; they depart at 9 am from the Placa dels Païso Catalans next to the Sants station and return mid-afternoon.

By Car: If driving, take the A2 to Martorell, then the C-16 through Vallvidrera tunnels; exit Monserratt and pick up the N-11 and then C-25 to wind up to the monastery.

> **Tip:** The ***Tot Montserrat*** is a discount card that can be purchased at the tourist office and includes return train to Barcelona, monastery aerial tramway, both funiculars, entrance to the museum and a self-service meal. *(Montserrat Oficina de Turismo, ☎ 93 877 77 01, fax 93 877 77 24, www.abadiamontserrat.net.)*

Sightseeing

Basilica

The polychromatic image of La Moreneta is displayed above the high altar in the 16th-century Renaissance Basilica, the main attraction of the Montserrat complex. The Basilica was badly damaged when Napoleon's troops seized and set fire to the grounds, though it has since been completely restored and the surrounding amusement park-like buildings added to accommodate the hordes of camera-toting tourists who arrive each day from Barcelona. A door to the right of the entrance with its glowing hush signs marks the beginning of the long line to pay respects to the Virgin. Traditionally, Cataluñan newlyweds make the drive to

Montserrat to kiss the Virgin and receive its blessing. It is free to walk around in the Basilica, a dark and evocative setting lit by elaborate silver and gold candle lanterns hung along its perimeter. To witness the 80 Benedictine monks at work, plan to arrive for mass at 11 am. Even better, arrive at 1 pm to hear the Montserrat Childrens Choir sing the Salve and Virolai hymn to the Virgin. The choir was established in the 13th century, making it one of Europe's oldest.

The **Museu de Montserrat** is divided into two sections, the *sección Antigua* adjacent to the cloister and the *sección Moderna* beneath the front plaza. A small collection of archeological relics from Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Holy Land are accompanied by gold and silver liturgical pieces, early paintings dated to the 13th century, including works by El Greco, Berruguete and Caravaggio, a few Impressionist paintings and modern art by the likes of Casas, Miró, Rusiñol, Picasso and Dalí. An audiovisual presentation details the day-to-day life of the monastery's monks. *(Placa del Monester, ☎ 93 835 02 51, open summers 10:30 am-2 pm and 3-6 pm, winters 10:30 am-1 pm for Antigua and 3-6 pm for Moderna.)*

Adventures on Foot

Climbing

Two Spanish crags stick out in the minds of rock climbers, El Chorro in Andalucía and Montserrat in Cataluña. The latter can be rather intimidating on approach – 65 sheer spindly peaks rising above the ground as unexpectedly as a sprig of nut grass on a golf course green. The skeptical will be relieved to know that the conglomerate rock is generally solid and that a few of the routes (and there are well over 1,000) are single pitch; most, however, are multi-pitch routes that range from the easiest grades to the expert-only vertical climb of the Moorish peak. The main routes are bolted and accessed via the signposted hiking paths throughout the park; the less frequented still hold the old-style rivets. A standard gear rack should suffice for intermediate climbs, preferably with a 60 m (197-foot) double rope and, because of the occasional small rock slides, a helmet.

The climbing guides at **Rodabosc** in the nearest town of Manresa offer equipment, an introductory climbing course for 18€ and guided climbs in Montserrat for 36€. *(San Baromeu 51, 08240 Manresa, ☎ 93 876 83 88.)*

If coming from Barcelona, you can stop by the **National Climbing Federation** headquarters there and pick up some tips, and perhaps a few fellow climbers. *(Federación Española de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada, C/ Floridablanca 15, 08015 Barcelona, ☎ 93 426 42 67, fax 93 426 33 87, www.fedme.es.)*

> **TIP:** Other useful resources include the book ***Montserrat*** by Luis Alfonso and Xavier Buxo, detailing, in Spanish, all of the routes in Montserrat, and the ***Rock Climbing Guide to Europe*** by David Jones.

Hiking

The Basilica is nice, and paying respects to the Virgin is commendable, but the real pleasure in a visit to Montserrat is seeking out its caves and secluded monasteries by way of the **hiking trails**. A number of exceptionally maintained and well-signposted trails lead through the peaks and valleys, with trailheads at both the

monastery complex and from the top stations of its two funicular trains, Sant Joan and Santa Cova, which run every 15 minutes between 10 am and 7 pm.

The trains are also the best way to access the **Parc Natural de Montserrat** and lose the tourist crowds. The park was recently established to protect the evergreen forests, the rare birds, wild boar and mountain goats and, particularly, the unique massif of Montserrat. Its main headquarters and Nature Interpretation Center is located at the top station of the Sant Joan funicular. Before heading out, pick up the handy brochure from the tourist office beside the monastery that details six of the most common hikes on the mountain. With time for only a short hike, you'll most likely want to follow the trail to the **Santa Cova Monastery**, easily accomplished in just over an hour. Take the steps across the road from the cafeteria and pick up the cement path of the Rosary, passing a lower station of the funicular de Santa Cova and continuing on. The alternative is to catch the **Funicular de Santa Cova** at the base station across the street from the large tourist trinket shop. From the top it is another 20-minute walk to the Santa Cova (Holy Cave) and the 18th-century chapel over the spot where it is said the Virgin image was rediscovered.

In 1900 Gaudí was commissioned to redesign the path. In doing so he modified the cave and placed an empty grave with the three Marys and an angel signifying the Resurrection; in yet another sign of the architect's genius, he positioned the grave so that the first rays of sunlight of the Spring Equinox would shine upon it each Easter Sunday.

From the cave you can continue on the trail, which makes a loop and connects with a number of other trails in returning to the base station of the Funicular de Sant Joan.

From the top station of Sant Joan the trail to the right reaches the hermitage and peak of **Sant Jeroni**, the highest point of Montserrat at 1,300 m (4,264 feet), in a little over an hour. The path straight ahead from the top station leads to the **hermitage of Sant Joan** and then loops through the valley of Font Seca via the **Les Bateries** trail, so-named for the canons strung along it in an unsuccessful defensive move against Napoleon's troops in the 19th century.

■ Sitges

Spain doesn't get much more liberated than Sitges, the beachside town south of Barcelona that has long been a draw to artists and eccentrics, young people looking to sew their oats for a few days and gays, who may be all three, but certainly know how to put the sizzle in the town's infamous Carnaval celebrations. To the ceaseless nightlife and the long, sandy beaches where it is fine to wear clothes but more than okay to go *desnudo*, Sitges adds a fine old quarter of whitewashed buildings split by pedestrian streets lined with shops, ranging from the elegant to the exotic to the downright bizarre. People come to Sitges to be themselves or someone else entirely; either way, it can make for a riotous affair.

Useful Information

There isn't all that much to Sitges (pronounced "seat-jes"). The old quarter spreads northwest from the town landmark, the 18th-century Iglesia de Sant Bartolomeu i Santa Tecla, set atop a modest promontory at the end of the long stretch of beach. The

main pedestrian streets with most of the bars and shops are just off this end of the beach. The **Oficina de Turismo** is a few blocks north of the old quarter by the railroad tracks *(C/ Sínia Morera 1, ☎ 93 894 50 04)*.

Getting Here

If you're coming from Barcelona, catch the coastal trains that runs several times a day from Placa Catalunya via Sants. It takes around an hour. There are also frequent daily buses, but that's much more of a hassle than it is worth. With your own wheels, just head south from Barcelona in the direction of the airport, pass by it heading toward Castelldefels and continue.

Carnaval

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the defining event of Sitges. The weeklong celebrations blast off in February or early March with heavy drinking, parades, costume balls and far more scandalous activities, crowned on the last night by a parade of eye-batting drag queens who just love it when you blow them kisses. Cádiz and Tenerife have good carnavals, and Río has the best, but none can hold a candle to the sordid twists and turns of Sitges.

Museums

Sitges owes its fame to the eccentric artist and writer Santiago Rusiñol (1861-1931), who bought a fisherman's cottage set on the edge of the promontory next to the church and transformed it into a bright statement of self-expression. The idea seems to have stuck. The artist organized festivals to promote *Modernista* styles and once paraded two El Grecos through the streets when El Grecos were the last thing anyone cool wanted hanging on their walls. The *Modernista* advocate was one of the artists responsible for getting Els 4 Gats café up and running in Barcelona and, during his years of jockeying back and forth between the two cities, attracted other artists to Sitges – while amassing quite a varied collection of artwork and bric-brac. His home and workshop is now the **Museu Cau Ferrat**, which displays the artist's private collection of paintings (Picasso and El Greco are on hand), sculpture, pottery and troves of curvilinear Moderniste ironwork for which the museum is named. *(C/ Fonollar s/n, ☎ 93 894 03 64, open summers 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm; winters Tues.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3-6:30 pm; entry 3€.)*

Next door the **Museu Maricel de Mar** seems reserved after Rusiñol's digs. The museum displays paintings, sculpture and ceramics dating from medieval times to contemporary. *(C/ Fonallar s/n, ☎ 93 894 03 64, open summers Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm; winters Tues.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3-6:30 pm, Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 3€.)*

The **Museu Romantic** expounds on the lifestyle of a typical bourgeois Sitges family of the 19th century with a collection of furniture, dress, music boxes and lots of porcelain dolls. *(C/ Sant Gaudenci 1, ☎ 93 894 03 64, open summers Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm; winters Tues.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm and 3-6:30 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-7 pm; entry 3€.)*

Beaches

The main beach is hard to miss right out from the old quarter. A promenade runs along this stretch, which is divided by jetties into three sections, each

with a different name. The crowds mass on the sands nearest the church and it thins out (somewhat) from there. On the far side of the church and promontory is the generally less crowded **Platja de St Sebastià**, while in the opposite direction, a short walk along the coast, you'll find the two "other" beaches, and these are where you can strip your clothes off and really get a tan. One is exclusively gay, but they're not going to ask for your gay membership card once you've laid out the beach towel.

Nightlife

It all goes down in a relatively confined space in the old quarter a block off the beach. There is the **Carrer 1er de Maig**, lined with raucous disco bars that stay open until the sun comes up and don't reopen until well after dark. Some are cheesy, others are dirty, but all are good fun. At the end of this street is the **Placa de la Industria** and beyond it the **C/ Marqués de Montroig**, where the sizzle fizzles a little with more of your standard kinds of bars. Many of the most notorious gay bars are just north of this zone around the **Carrer Sant Bonaventura**.

Where to Stay & Eat

It is notoriously difficult to find a room in during the summer and all but impossible during Carnaval. Make reservations well, well in advance. The loud ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel El Terramar** separates the regular beaches from the wild beaches southwest of Sitges' old quarter. It is a great big posh place with large private balconies and a swimming pool that overlooks the sea. *(Passeig Marítim 80, ☎ 93 894 00 50; d 90-143€.)*

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Hotel Romàntic is cute and very popular with the gay crowd, who just love its interior garden. Rooms with private baths are done up in a variety of engaging décor. *(C/ Sant Isidre 33, ☎ 93 894 83 75; d 75-85€.)*

Hotel Capri occupies a small historical palace with its three pompous little towers intact. It is in a residential zone about five minute's walk from the beach. *(Avda Sofia 13-15, ☎ 93 811 02 67; d 75-115€.)*

Ex Xalet is wierded out – a solid choice if you like Woody Guthrie music *(Iilla de Cuba 35, ☎ 93 811 00 70; 55-85€)*. **Pension Maricel's** colorless rooms have the bare essentials, which include a private bathroom *(C/ Tacó 11, ☎ 93 894 36 27; d 40-55€)*. **Hostal Bonaire** *(Carrer de Bonaire 31, ☎ 93 894 53 26; 45€)* offers simple rooms with bath and just down the street so does **Hostal Mogar** *(Carrer de Bonair 2, ☎ 93811 00 09; 40-45€)*.

The nearest campsite is **Camping El Rocà** beyond the Platja de St Sebastìa near the railroad tracks *(Avda de Ronda, ☎ 93 894 00 43)*. Of the three nearby campsites, it has the fewest facilities and is the most expensive at 4.39€ per person, tent or car. Both **Camping Sitges** *(Ctra 246 km 38, ☎ 93 894 10 80; 3.88€ per person, tent or car)* and the giant **Camping El Garrofer** *(Ctra 246 km 39, ☎ 93 894 17 80; 3.88€ per person, tent or car)* are on the Carretera 246 running past Sitges.

For fine dining on creative Mediterranean fare try either **Restaurant Maricel** *($$$$, Passeig de la Ribera 6, ☎ 93 894 20 54; 40€)* or **El Velero** *($$$$, Passeig de la Ribera 38, ☎ 93 894 20 51).* **Restaurant Con Pagès**, two blocks off the beach, served a commendable seafood *fideuá* (similar to *paella*, but with pasta instead of rice) and has good art on the walls to look at *(C/ Sante Pere 24-26, ☎ 93 894 11 95)*.

■ L'Escala

The fishing village of L'Escala on the Costa Brava has many attractions but few of them are in the town itself. Off its coast, windsurfing and kitesurfing are as good as they get on the eastern Mediterranean shore. To the north, the remarkable ruins of the sixth-century BC Greek trading settlement of Empúries can be explored. And to the south, a mile off the coast, the Medes Islands are undeniably the *sitio numero uno* to scuba dive along Spain's Mediterranean coast, though closer to L'Escala are some very deep underwater caverns frequented by divers, as well as an ancient shipwreck. What L'Escala lacks in taste (it fell victim to the scourge of nasty resort development in the 1950s and '60s) it makes up for with a fun roster of watersports. Sea kayaks can be rented to float the watertrails through cliffs and tunnels, as can other tourist incentives like jet skis and sailboats, or you can take a trip in a glass-bottom catamaran boat. But, were it not for the ruins, these activities and this would be little different from any other coastal town.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is in the main plaza between the old quarter and the new *(Placa de les Escoles 1, ☎ 97 277 06 03, www.lescala.org)*.

Kayaking Costa Brava rents kayaks from its shop on the beach of Cala Montgó south of town *(☎ 97 277 38 06)*.

Fun Tastic on the Platja de Riells rents windsurfing and kiteboarding equipment *(☎ 97 277 41 84)*.

The **Mare Mostrum catamaran** is docked in the port de La Clota and offers a variety of trips throughout the day, such as to the Medes Islands, the market in Cadaqués or no place in particular for fishing and snorkeling *(C/ Maranges 3, ☎ 97 77 37 97)*.

Cycle Point rents mountain bikes at 6€ for a half-day or 10€ for a full day. To reach their office, follow C/ Sant Briu away from the Platja de Riells; make a right on C/ Ginesa and the second left *(C/ Mallols 46, ☎ 97 24 61 94)*.

Tot-Rent/Aventura rents jet-skis, four-wheelers, dirt bikes, scooters and boats. Their office is one block of the Platja de Riells at #10 Avinguda Montgó *(☎ 97 277 37 53)*.

Orientation

The ports and the newer parts of L'Escala have developed around the Bay of L'Aspre and its beach, **Platja de Riells**. From it the **Passeig del Mar** promenade wraps around the coast to reach the old quarter on the slight promontory a few blocks north. The action along the beach in the new area is good, but the old quarter has the only ambiance in town. You can continue on around the old quarter to reach a long stretch of more appealing beaches, which lead to the archeological sight of

Empúries. On the coast south from the port and the new quarter the secluded cove (*cala*) of **Montgó**, with its small beach beneath the Muntanya de Montgó, allow for a more secluded retreat.

The Ruins of Empúries

What remains of one of Spain's earliest cities is enough to paint the picture of a thriving market town with its own places of worship, salt factories and irrigation, art, palaces for the wealthy and what would have been stone shanties for the poor. Greek traders had been floating around this area known today as Empúries as early as the seventh century BC before they decided to establish a settlement a century later to take full advantage of their trading links with native inhabitants of the peninsula. They built Emporium (market) and it thrived for some 300 years. Then the Punic Wars went down and Scipio, seeking to cut off land access to his foes the Carthaginians, arrived in a boat with his Roman troops. Thus began the long period of Romanization on the Iberian Peninsula. By 195 BC the Romans had begun to build their own city adjacent to the Greek's Emporium. They renamed the site Municipium Emporiae and for roughly 100 years it was occupied, until the more accessible ports at Tarraco (Tarragona) and Barcino (Barcelona) led the Romans to abandon it. The remaining Roman inhabitants then moved a short way north and built their village of Sant Martí d'Empúries. The fishermen from that village would go on to found L'Escala, what is now the largest town in the area, during the 16th century.

With a little imagination it is all there, laid out before your eyes with the sea crashing against the coast a few feet away – that is, what we can see of it. Only about 25% of the ruins have been excavated since the site's discovery in 1908 and debates have been ongoing since over whether the excavation should continue. Chained walkways make walking through the Greek and the Roman ruins just behind them a breeze and well-placed placards detail in English and Spanish exactly what each little space was used for. Many are self-explanatory, as with the Roman temples and the gates. You're free to explore at will, though it may be helpful to stop in at the museum first to figure out what it all represents. *(Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya, Alt Empordà, ☎ 97 277 02 08, fax 97 277 42 60, open Oct. 1-May 31 every day 10 am-6 pm; June 1-Sept. 30 every day 10 am-8 pm; entry 2.40€.)*

Where to Stay

Hotel Nieves Mar is a modern hotel on the Passeig Marítim skirting the coast. Rooms are pleasant with private bath, television and balconies overlooking the sea *(Passeig Marítim 8, ☎ 97 277 03 00, fax 97 277 36 05; d 75-100€)*.

In the old quarter, **Hostal Mediterrà** offers stark rooms with private showers and public restrooms, a plain-Jane dining room and small bar *(Carrer Riera 24, ☎ 97 277 00 28, fax 97 277 45 93; d 35€)*.

Adventures on Water

The Illes Medes

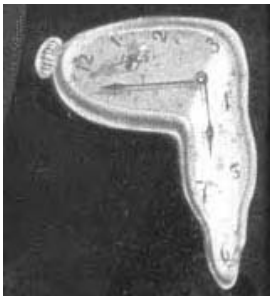
Diving in the Mediterranean off the Spanish coast can be average to downright disappointing. And then comes a special place like the Medes Islands and the joys of sea scuba diving are fully recognized. This small archipelago of seven rocky islets a mile off the Costa Brava near the town of L'Estartit is a beacon for over 1,345 marine species, making it one of the richest underwater environments in the whole of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the result of an ideal situation near the mouth of the Río Ter, which feeds it with organic material, and strong wind and sea currents from the north that bring further riches. By the 1950s, fishing that had gone on since the Middle Ages had all but wiped out the Medes marine life, until the Catalan government stepped in to put a ban on fishing around the islands in 1983. The natural environment has steadily improved since, much to the relief of local marine biologists, not to mention scuba divers. What lies beneath are calcified algae and deeper corral reefs harboring red and yellow sponges, sea anemones, starfish, octopus, bream, sea bass, conger eels, groupers, barracuda, amberjack and Atlantic bonito. While you're not guaranteed to see all of these species, there are plenty of others where they came from, as well as numerous underwater cavities and tunnels waiting to be explored.

Diving Logistics

There are countless diveshops in the town of L'Estartit. From its beach you can clearly see the islands. **Xaloc Dive Center** is a PADI-certified shop that offers single dives for 26€, nitrox dives for an additional 6€ and night dives for 40€. If you aren't certified, it will take two days to get that way and cost 210€ *(C/ Eivissa 1, ☎ 97 275 20 71, fax 97 275 12 31, www.xalocdive.com)*. If you're staying in nearby L'Escala, the **Cormorá Dive Center** can get you to the islands on one of its boats in under 10 minutes. A single dive with full equipment costs 36€ *(Club Náutico 10, ☎ 97 245 28 45, fax 97 245 10 05, www.cormora.com)*. After one or two dives on the islands you could make a change and explore the many ancient shipwrecks along the coast. Both diveshops will take you there.

■ In Search of Salvador Dalí

"I believe that the moment is near when by a procedure of active paranoiac thought, it will be possible to systematize confusion and contribute to the total discrediting of the world of reality." Dalí



"Dalíland," as it has been called, is in the Empordà region in northeastern Cataluña, roughly two hours north of Barcelona. It was here that preeminent Surrealist Salvador Dalí was born and created his greatest body of art before his death. Today it is a prerequisite destination for admirers of the artist's mind-boggling creations. In three towns his former residences have been converted into museums, two of which were up and running before Dalí had died, making him the first living artist with two museums devoted to his work. Chief among them is the **Teatre-Museu Dalí** in the artist's

hometown of Figueres, a former theater that Dalí purchased and converted into an audacious monument, complete with egg-shaped battlements and a rainy taxi that is part of the largest collection of his works compiled. Its three floors offer a scintillating glimpse into the mind of a dreamer.

In Púbol the medieval castle that was the residence of Dalí's wife Gala has since been opened to the public as the **Casa-Museu Castell Gala-Dalí**. While few of Dalí's own works are on hand, the museum preserves the castle's original décor, including paintings, sculpture and antique furniture. The artist and his wife spent their summers in Portlligat on the Costa Brava near Cadaqués, now home to the **Casa-Museu Salvador Dalí**, a complex of fishing huts comprising the artist's studio, library and family rooms. It is possible to visit all three in one day on an excursion from Barcelona. Set out early and stop first at the Púbol castle museum outside of Girona, before moving on to Figueres and Cadaqués. The latter is the loveliest fishing village on the Costa Brava and well worth spending a night in before returning to reality.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989)

From the modest plains of Empordà a storm had begun to brew that wouldn't run its course until some changes had been made. This was to be Salvador Dalí's backdrop throughout his career, the place of his birth (Figueres, May 11, 1904), his first exhibition (Figueres Theater 1919; age 14), his marriage (shrine of Els Àngels outside Girona, 1958), his death and burial (Figueres, 1989; buried in the theater next to the church in which he was christened and eulogized). "The only way of reaching the universal," said Dalí the painter, sculptor, filmmaker, handlebar moustache, notorious voyeur, agitator, exhibitionist, scandal, eccentric, egotist, outspoken, self-promoter, one-man-show and, yes, genius, "is through the ultra-local."

By age six Dalí – named for his older brother who had died at infancy and, some speculate, treated as the reincarnation of his namesake – had created his first painting. At age seven he declared that he wanted to be Napoleon. But that would have to wait. First he would need to attend the Escuela de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, where he would meet future filmmaker Luis Buñuel and poet Federico Garcia Lorca. He left with little more than those key acquaintances and a letter of expulsion.

Over the next decade Dalí's career would begin to take off. In 1925 he held his first solo show in Barcelona, and later designed a controversial set for Lorca's first performance, *Mariana Pineda*. In 1929 he stole his best friend's wife Gala and then moved to Paris to collaborate on Bunuel's groundbreaking film, *Un Chien Andalou*, a rollicking collage of strange images and ideas, with no real plot. At one point in the film, the camera zooms in on a woman's eye as a razor blade is raised to it. Almost imperceptibly, the face of the

woman is replaced by that of a dead cow, as the blade slices nastily into the eyeball.

By this time, Dalí had met Miró and been introduced to the emerging Surrealist movement. In short order, he painted some of his first masterpieces, including *The Big Masturbateur*, *Portrait of Paul Eluard* (the man whose wife he had stolen) and *The Lugubrious Game*. Dalí became increasingly outspoken. He once said late in life, "Today's young painters believe in nothing. It is normal for someone who believes in nothing to end up painting practically nothing, which is the case in the whole of modern art, including the abstract, aesthetic and academic varieties."

Dalí was, by this time, a very made man who could recreate Alice Cooper's brain with an éclair and ants, or arrive for a speech ("Vermeer and the Rhinoceros") at Paris' refined Sorbonne in a white Rolls Royce filled with cauliflowers and raise only a few eyebrows. People had come to expect the outlandish from Dalí. Was the man mad? He who had declared "there is more madness to my method than method to my madness." According to Dalí, "the only difference between me and a mad man is that I am not mad."

Hitler, Freud, Gala and money were his inspirations. Money would be the catalyst of his exclusion from the Surrealists, a movement he had given a devilish face to. The depiction of a man's soiled pants in his *The Lugubrious Game* had been but a mild insult to the group. Once it was clear that Dalí was painting for money rather than for art's sake – as when he accepted a job to design ads for an underpants manufacturer – his fellow Surrealists had had enough. Dalí was out. André Breton, the leader of the Surrealists, began to refer to Salvador Dalí as Avida Dollars, a coy anagram. "The only difference between the Surrealists and me," Dalí would later say, "is that I am a Surrealist." But Gala, his lodestar, was always there, just as she had promised shortly after meeting him. The artist returned to the tenets of classicism in his mythical and nuclear phase, he wrote books, collaborated with Alfred Hitchcock in his move *Spellbound*, painted the landscapes of his beloved Cap de Creus near his summer retreat of Cadaqués and finally married Gala. His well-known infatuation with money had never wavered, though, leading to reports that the artist frequently signed blank canvases and allowed others to paint and sell them for big bucks as a "Dalí." The veracity of many of his less characteristic works remains questionable still.

In the 1960s his paranoid-critical method manifested itself in large canvases like *The Battle of Tetuan*. His health declined in the 1970s and as a result depression wrecked the man who had once declared "There are some days when I think I'm going to die from an overdose of satisfaction." Then Gala died in the 1980s. Grief-stricken, Dalí moved into the Púbol castle he had bought for his wife years before; he needed to be close to her tomb. There, in an eerie case of foreshadowing, he painted his last works with an obvious eye to the catastrophic. A fire swept through the castle, severely burning and almost killing Dalí. His career was finished. He moved in to the Torre Galatea next to his museum in Figueres and for the last few years of his life rarely ventured outside of his room. The man who had captured the irrational reality of dreams had become one.

"Oh Salvador Dalí, of the olive-colored voice,
I do not raise your halting adolescent brush,
Or your pigments that flirt, with the pigments of your times
But I laud your longing for eternity without limits."
Federico Garcia Lorca, *Ode to Salvador Dalí*

Figueres

Its name has become synonymous with native son Salvador Dalí, but is there more? Figueres, the capital of the Alt Empordá region of Cataluña, comprising the upper half of the alluvial plains created by the Ríos Fluvià and Muga, is not a bad place to spend an afternoon, maybe a night. It does have an entertaining central promenade, the little sister of Barcelona's and also called La Rambla as it once marked the course of a stream. Along its sides are cafés named Dalí and Dalí gift shops and art galleries as well as the **Museu de l'Empordà** with archeological relics found in the region, medieval sculpture, Baroque and 19th- and 20th-century paintings *(Rambla 2, ☎ 97 250 23 05).*

At the end of La Rambla a block of houses were demolished in the 1920s to make way for the sculpture of native Narcís Monturiol by Enric Casanoves. Monturiol (1819-1885), an engineer and inventor, conducted what are credited as the first successful experiments with a functioning submarine, his *Icineu*. Off the Rambla one can visit a museum devoted to toys – over 4,000 of them. The **Museu de Joguets** even has a few that bouncing baby boys Dalí and Miró once slobbered on *(Hotel París, C / de Sant Pere 1, ☎ 97 250 45 85).*

And on a hill just outside of town there is the **Castell de Sant Fernand**, an 18th-century castle in which the Republicans made their last stand during the Spanish Civil War after Barcelona had fallen. It is still a fully functioning military base, though it was recently opened for guided visits *(Pujada del Castell, ☎ 97 267 44 99).* But it is the Teatre-Museu Dalí that I, for one, have come to see. And after that, I'll probably just hit the C-260 east and head for the Costa Brava to see more Dalí.

"I don't do drugs. I am drugs." S.D.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is located in the Placa del Sol, a few blocks south of the Dalí museum *(☎ 97 250 31 55).* The **bus** *(☎ 97 267 33 54)* and **train station** *(☎ 97 250 46 61)* are next to the Placa de la Esació, a 10-minute walk southeast from the Dalí museum. From the east end of La Rambla walk south on Carrer Blanc and then make a left on Carrer Sant Llàtzer. **Barcelona Bus** *(☎ 93 593 12 16)* runs daily from Barcelona through Girona to Figueres. To get to Cadaqués, catch the **SARFA** buses *(☎ 97 267 42 98).* Trains run regularly throughout the day from Barcelona's Estació-Sants.

Teatre-Museu Dalí

The theater that hosted the artist's first exhibition at the age of 14 would later be purchased by him and transformed into a spectacle that only *he* could have imagined. It is a righteous trip into the world of Surrealism both inside and out, where loaves of bread protrude from the pink walls in imitation of Salamanca's Casa de las Conchas, and great white eggs adorn the

roofline around a sparkling geodesic dome. The line to get inside (and it is a long one as the museum is second only to Madrid's Prado in the number of visitors it sees) leads into the central patio. It once held the theater's stalls – destroyed by a fire during the Spanish Civil War. In their place is the infamous rainy Cadillac (insert a coin and it rains on the plastic passengers) with the sculpture of Queen Esther as its hood ornament and behind it a giant totem pole of stacked tires topped by a boat that once belonged to Dalí's wife Gala. Over here is the *Self-Portrait with Slice of Grilled Bacon*, and there, *The Bread Basket*, *Galarina*, *The Spectre of Sex-Appeal* and a room that leads to Dalí's crypt.

Although the above are notable Dalí works, the vast majority of his greatest pieces are not on hand in the museum. They have been spirited away by other museums and private buyers, but it matters not, as each of the artist's periods is well represented.

Dalí wanted his works to be seen as a whole, and thus refused to have them catalogued or exhibited in chronological order. Before mounting the steps to the first floor, look at the painting *Gala Nude Watching the Sea*. In a nod to Rothko, Dalí layered the face of Honest Abe Lincoln into the image. Now to the elaborate Sala Palau del Vent (Wind Palace Room) and Sala de les Joies (Jewel Room), with 39 original jewels designed by Dalí, then on to the Sala Mae West, a room of scattered installations that merge to form the face of the famous actress when viewed through an optical lens at the top of a staircase.

Other rooms are devoted to paintings by Dalí's friend Antoni Pitxot and to pieces from his private collection, including works by Duchamp, El Greco, Fortuny and Urgell. Take some Excedrin and set aside at least two hours to become absorbed in its fantasy. *(Placa Gala-Salvador Dalí 5, 17600 Figueres, ☎ 97 267 75 00, fax 97 250 16 66, www.Salvador-dali.org; open July-Sept. 9 am-7:45 pm; rest of year 10:30 am-5:45 pm; entry 9€, students 6.50€.)*

Where to Stay & Eat

The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Durán** is a fine choice near the Dalí museum with a popular restaurant – expect dinner to cost around 30€ *(C/ Lausaca 5, ☎ 97 250 12 50; d 60-75€).* The ☆☆ **Hotel Europa** offers adequate accommodations a short walk from the lively Placa del Sol in the city center *(Ronda Firal 37, ☎ 97 250 07 44; d 35-40€).*

Púbol

Casa-Museu Castell Gala-Dalí

Dalí bought this Gothic-Renaissance castle near the township of La Bisbal for his wife in 1970 under the strict condition that he could visit here only if personally invited. Together they decorated it with paintings Dalí had bought as gifts and furnished it with furniture acquired during their frequent antiquing trips. All are preserved, along with Dalí's watercolor depiction of the castle and Gala's haute-couture wardrobe ensemble. A tour of the grounds includes the gardens and pond, adorned with a sculpture by Dalí, the various entertainment and private rooms as well as a trip down into the basement where Gala is buried. After she died in 1982 Dalí moved from his studio in Portlligat to this castle, where he created his last works and almost died when a fire swept through his bedroom late one night. After this traumatic event that left the artist severely scarred, he retired to Figueres to live

out the rest of his days as a hermit. *(Púbol, 17120 La Pera, ☎ 97 248 86 55, www.Salvador-dali.org; open March 15-June 14 Tues.-Sun. 10:30 am-6 pm; June 15-Sept. 15 every day 10:30 am-8 pm; Sept. 16-Nov 1 Tues.-Sun. 10:30 am-6 pm; entry 5.50€).*

> *"Have no fear of perfection. You'll never reach it."*
> S.D.

Getting Here

By Train: Catch the Barcelona-Portbou line to the Flacà station, which is four km (2.4 miles) from Púbol and from there either walk or flag down a taxi. **SARFA buses** *(☎ 97 267 43 98)* run daily from Barcelona to Flacà.

By Car: If coming from Figueres or Cadaqués, take the C-31 south to Verges, pick up the C-252 and turn right onto the C-66 at the crossroads in Parlavà and make the next right to La Pera and then Púbol. If arriving by car from Barcelona take the E-15/A-7 motorway north, exit at Girona Nord and then the take the C-66 in the direction of Palamó. Pass the town of Bordils and then turn right at the signs pointing to La Pera. Púbol is just beyond it.

Cadaqués

The peaceful fishing village of Cadaqués is nestled on a small bay of the Costa Brava between slate gray terraced hills. Unlike the neighboring towns of this coast, it was never swept up in the frenzied resort development of the 1960s. Instead, it became a popular retreat for artists and intellectuals like Picasso, André Breton, Lorca, Marcel Duchamp, Walt Disney and Salvador Dalí. Thankfully, the village looks much the same as it did when Dalí spent time here soaking in the wild, rocky coastal scenes of the Cap de Creus peninsula and Portlligat to the north; the sparkling white buildings wrap the small bay and envelope two small hills flanking it.

One of the hills is capped by the spotless **Iglesia de Santa María**, a late Gothic 16th-century edifice with a remarkable Baroque altarpiece. In the center, a small plaza surrounded by a handful of bars and terrace restaurants looks out on the sheltered waters of the bay, anchored with modest fishing boats and, in the summer, with audacious sailboats.

Cadaqués has quite a reputation with the European jet-set and an exclusive air as a result. While slightly pricier than other Costa Brava enclaves, it remains serene and evocative, which they are not.

> *"Cadaqués, at the fulcrum of water and hill,*
>
> *lifts flights of stairs and hides seashells."* Federico Garcia Lorca

Casa-Museu Salvador Dalí

After marrying Gala, Dalí bought a fisherman's hut on the bay of Portlligat just north of Cadaqués, an area where he had spent much time during his youth. Over the next 30 years he bought up the surrounding houses overlooking the Platja Llaner and left that indelible Dalí stamp on each of them. A walk between the whitewashed buildings of Dalí's own little world is accomplished via a series of stairways and entails a visit to his workshop spaces and the private family room, a look at the keyhole-shaped pool (no swimming

allowed) and, most importantly, the beautiful surrounding landscape that found its way onto countless Dalí canvases.

Though not difficult to access, you need to call, e-mail or fax ahead of time to arrange a visit. Small groups are led by a guide through the complex at set times. *(Portlligat, 17488 Cadqués, ☎ 97 225 10 15, www.Salvador-dali.org; open March 15-Jun 14 Tues.-Sun. 10:30 am-6 pm; June 15-Sept. 16 every day 10:30 am-9 pm; Sept. 16-Jan 6 10:30 am-6 pm; entry 8€.)*

To actually see some Dalí works, as well as a few Cubist works by Picasso, who painted these scenes before Dalí made the area trendy, visit the **Museu Perrot-Moore** in Cadaqués next to the church. *(C/ Narcís Monturiol 15, ☎ 97 225 88 77, open daily 11 am-1:30 pm and 4-8:30 pm; entry 2€.)*

Useful Information

The **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** is down the steps from the Placa Dr. Trèmois next to the water *(C/ Cotxe 2, ☎ 97 225 83 15).* **SARFA buses** run daily to Cadaqués from Figueres, Barcelona and during the weekdays from Girona *(☎ 97 225 87 13.)*

The nearest **train** stop is in Llancà, fully an hour away. Most prefer to get off in Figueres and catch the bus from there.

Where to Stay & Eat

☆☆☆ **Hotel Octavia** offers doubles with private bath and television a short walk from the beach *(C/ St. Vicence s/n, ☎ 97 215 92 25, fax 97 225 10 53, www.hoteloctavia.net; d 75-85€).*

Hostal Marina is cheaper and nicer than the adjacent **Hostal Christina** *(☎ 97 225 81 38)* in the main plaza. Ask for one of the exterior rooms with a two-tiered terrace overlooking the bay. Rooms come with and without full, private bath *(C/ La Riera 3, ☎ 97 215 90 91, fax 97 225 81 99; d 40-50€).*

For a great seafood meal from a family-owned and -run kitchen, hike up the church hill to **Restaurant Vehí** *($$, C/ de l'Església 6, ☎ 97 225 84 70)*. The family also rents out basic pension rooms next door. The cavernous bar **L'Hostai** on the main plaza is the best place in Cadaqués for a cocktail and live music with ambiance *(☎ 97 225 80 00).*

The Catalan Pyrenees

All the emerald cirque lakes, the majestic snow-capped peaks, the valleys carved by transparent, winding rivers and the stone villages that characterize the great mountain chain separating France from Spain are exhibited on its eastern flank, claimed by Cataluña. From the rocky cliffs of the Cap de Creus Peninsula of the Mediterranean, the Catalan Pyrenees extend westward and upward as far as the vibrant Val d'Aran, near the highest Catalan peak of Mount Aneto (3,404 m/11,165 feet). Where clusters of ski slopes around the large village of Puigcerdà in the Cerdanya Valley and Viella in the Aran Valley have invited development and crowds, the vast expanse of the Catalan Pyrenees remains just that – vast and unspoiled, wild and colorful.

As the village of Ripoll celebrates its immensely entertaining medieval festival, the villages of Sort and Llavorsí tend to the whitewater enthusiasts who have been lured there by the challenging stretch of the Río Noguera in the

Pallaresa Valley. A short way upriver and the scenery of the Parc Nacional de Aigüestortes unfolds, with its jagged ridges and waterfalls dumping into deep blue glacial lakes and shallow twisting streams. Hiking is the paramount activity in this park, as it is throughout the range. Indeed there is no better way to experience the Catalan Pyrenees than by ditching the car and setting out on foot to explore its isolated spaces.

■ Ripoll

A sign on the way into town reads "*Benvinguts a Ripoll, bressol de Catalunya*" (Welcome to Ripoll, birthplace of Catalunya). As I approached by bus, the main highway through the village looked deserted and the passengers were getting restless to get on to Puigcerda. But then there was some movement down a side street, a crowd even. We rolled down our windows and heard drums beating. It was August 11 and little did we know we had just entered the Middle Ages. The entire town had piled into the two main pedestrian streets of the village – cobbled streets set between old granite buildings. Sawdust was strewn on the cobbles and booths lined both sides of the street. People were everywhere, dressed in medieval clothes, singing, shouting, shopping from one stand to the next. Here were homemade chocolates for sale, crafts and jewelry. Here, free wine and liquor, plus bread to moderate the buzz. Here herbal medicines professing to cure everything from psoriasis to stress to common backache. An old man led a string of donkeys through the crowd, each bearing by a smiling kid with dried chocolate around his mouth and a rubber band gun locked and loaded. Then came the snake man with a 10-foot Burmese python wrapped around his neck leading a group of flute players. The crowd enveloped them, pushing the four of us back against the wall. A man stood in a doorway, watching. "What is going on?" I asked him. "It is the Mercadal del Comte Guifré," the man said. "Which is?" I asked. "Today is the commemoration of the death of Comte Guifré, the founder of Cataluña. If you want to know more, go visit him in the Monasteria de Santa María, over there," he gestured with his hands. "Now, if you'll excuse me while I catch up with that man. He's wearing my snake."

Ripoll was the original seat of the fiefdom that consolidated what is modern day Cataluña. It was established by Guifé el Pilos (Wilfred the Hairy) after the Moors had been pushed out of the region at the end of the ninth century by a Frankish army from the northern Pyrenees. Thanks to the establishment of self-rule under the legendary and heroic Wilfred, Cataluña was poised to develop into one of the great maritime kingdoms of the early Middle Ages. The remains of Wilfred, who is said to have had hair everywhere he shouldn't have, are housed in the **Monestir de Santa María de Ripoll**, which he founded in the ninth century. An early 19th-century fire wiped out most of the original construction, though the library and the 12th-century Romanesque portal survived. The rest fell to the whims of the 19th-century architects who restored it, somewhat distastefully. *(Placa Abat Oliba, open 10 am-1 pm and 3-7 pm.)*

Getting Here

To reach Ripoll on the **train**, hitch the line from the Sants train station in Barcelona heading to Puigcerdà. Daily **buses** from Girona are run by Autobuses TEISA *(☎ 97 270 20 95)*.

Where to Stay

While most prefer to push on to Olot or Puigcerda, it may be getting late. **Pension La Trobada** offers modest, heated accommodations in town with private bath and shower *(C/ Compositor Honorat Vilamanya 5, ☎ 97 270 23 53; d 45€)*. Another option is ☆☆☆ **Hotel Solana del Ter** just outside of town. The establishment has fully furnished rooms along with a restaurant, tennis court, swimming pool and park *(C-17, km 92.5, ☎ 07 270 10 62, fax 97 271 43 43, www.solanadelter.com, hotel@solandelter.com; d 72€)*.

■ Olot & Garrotxa National Park

There is not a whole lot to do in Olot, but there is the surrounding volcanic zone of La Garrotxa to explore. Around the turn of the 20th century a group of painters known as the Olot School became notable for their depictions of the surrounding landscape with its beech woods and ancient volcanic uplifts and craters. As it is the largest village in the region of La Garrotxa, visitors often stop in to stock up on picnic goods for a traipse through the natural surroundings. While you're at it, stretch the legs on a walking tour of the 18th-century palaces of Olot.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** has plenty of brochures and information on activities in the park *(Placa del Mercat, ☎ 97 226 01 41)*. Olot can be reached by **bus** from Girona two to three times daily and once a day from Ripoll.

Adventures on Foot

The **Parc Natural de la Zona Volcanical de la Garrotxa** can be explored on foot from Olot or by hiring horses at one of the nearby stables, the closest of which is in Sant Pau, on a fertile plain in the center of the park – the result of ancient volcanic activity, a rarity on the Iberian Peninsula. The name Garrotxa means, literally and appropriately, "torn earth." Tall volcanic cones alternate with the deep and wide craters of a number of extinct volcanoes; terraced hills and the topsoil that has accumulated in the thousand years since has given rise to a lush scenery and **La Fageda d'En Jordà**, one of the richest beech forests on the peninsula. You can walk through this forest by starting out in Olot and end up at the Volcàn de Santa Margarida, the largest crater in the park at 350 m (1,148 feet) in diameter. The guide service **Tour Turistic** offers horseback rides through the park for 10€ per hour *(Ctra Olo-Santa Pau, km 7, ☎ 97 268 03 58, www.garrotxa.com/turisme)*. Their office is in the **Camping Lava Ecológica**, which makes a perfect base camp from which to explore the park *(☎ 97 268 03 58, fax 97 268 03 58)*. The camping site has a long list of facilities, including bungalows, a restaurant and grocery store, swimming pool and hot showers. You can also rent mountain bikes here and pick up a trail map of the park.

Where to Stay

There are copious accommodations in Olot, including the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Borrell** *(Nònit Escubos 8, ☎ 97 227 61 61, fax 97 227 04 08, www.agtat.es/borrell; d 60€)*. Or there is the cheaper **Hotel**

Perla d'Olot *(Avda Santa Coloma 97, ☎ 97 226 23 26, fax 97 227 07 74; d 47€).* Another option is the **Pension La Vila** *(C/ Sant Roc 1, ☎ 97 226 98 07; d 35€).*

■ Puigcerdà

If the peaceful mountains have all but lulled you to sleep, Puigcerdà (pronounced Poo-cher-da) is a good pick-me-up. For its nightlife and its historical quarter this hopping village is the preferred base camp of skiers and mountaineers to the nearby resorts of La Molina, Masell and Vall de Núria. The village is located on a hill in the middle of the broad Cerdanyà Valley, surrounded by peaks. Waiting at the top are three adjacent plazas surrounded by restaurants and cafés, *churrerías*, bars and two movie theaters.

The largest of the plazas, the Placa de Santa María with its ruined Torre del Companario, is connected to a fourth plaza, that of Placa Cabrinetty, by the Carrer Major, the main pedestrian zone and spine of the old quarter. There isn't much to see monumentally as Puigcerdà was heavily bombed during the Spanish Civil War, hence the bell tower in the Placa de Santa María that is missing its church.

When it isn't frozen over, boats can be rented at the small public lake north of the Placa Barcelona known as L'Estany; the lake was built in the 14th century to augment the village's water supply and since surrounded by attractive mansions. And there is one monument, east of the Puigcerdà on its outskirts, the **Convento de Sant Domènec**, dating to 1291.

Useful Information

The **Patronato Comarcal de Turismo de la Cerdanya** is in the old quarter on C/ Espanya 44 *(☎ 97 288 21 61)*, while another tourism office is on C/ Querol 1. The **train** station is southwest of town beneath the hill in the Placa Estació *(☎ 97 288 01 65)*. Trains depart from Barcelona's Sants station daily. Alsina Graells **buses** *(☎ 93 265 68 66)* run daily from Barcelona to the Placa Barcelona and Placa Estació.

Adventures on Snow

Three ski resorts are near Puigcerdà: Vall de Nuria, La Molina and Masella.

The **Estación de Esquí Valle de Núria** *(Queralbs, ☎ 97 273 20 20, fax 97 273 20 24, www.valldenuria.com)* is the smallest of the three and farthest from Puigcerdà, located to the southeast on the N-152 near the village of Ribes de Freser. From this village you can catch the scenic cog railway to the slopes; it runs every hour beginning at 7:30 am with the last return from Núria around 9 pm *(14€ round-trip).* The resort, with a peak of 2,252 m (7,387feet), has two green, four blue, two red and two black runs serviced by one seated lift and two poma-lifts. A single-day adult lift ticket costs 20.55€ and a full set of equipment can be rented at the base village for 13.60€.

The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Valle de Núria** offers simple rooms with wood floors, private bath, satellite television and telephone. Doubles are around 75€ per night *(☎ 97 273 20 20).*

The **Estación de Esquí La Molina** *(Avenida Supermolina s/n, ☎ 97 289 21 64, fax 97 214 50 48, www.lamolina.com)* is Spain's oldest resort and a very

satisfactory one for intermediate skiers. The laid-back scene, good snow-making coverage and easy connection to the heavily wooded runs of neighboring resort Masella make it a good option in this area even if the snow hasn't been up to snuff. The resort has a half-pipe, seven green, eight blue, 13 red and three black runs serviced by one gondola, six chairlifts and six poma-lifts. A single day adult pass costs 27.50€. A bus departs Barcelona Wed., Fri., Sat. and Sun. at 6:15 am from Ronda Universitat and returns from the resort parking lot at 5 pm. The resort is near the village of Alp, a 20-minute drive south from Puigcerdà.

Places to stay in Alp include the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Jaume** *(C/ Central 30, ☎ 97 289 00 16, fax 97 214 42 42, d 65-85€)* and the ☆ **Aero-Hotel Cerdanya** *(Passeig Agnés Fabra 4, ☎ 97 289 00 33; d 30€).*

The **Estación de Esquí Masella** is a good choice for intermediate skiers and, thanks to new high-speed lifts, no longer has the long lines that once plagued it. The lower slopes cut through a heavily wooded section are particularly entertaining and a number of off-piste runs offer greater challenges for solid skiers. The resort has a half-pipe, 15 green, 18 blue, 13 red and six black runs serviced by five chair-lifts and eight poma-lifts. A single day adult pass costs 29€. Arrival directions and accommodations are the same as those for the adjacent resort of La Molina, mentioned above *(Peu de Pista s/n, ☎ 97 214 40 00, fax 97 289 00 78, www.masella.com)*.

Extreme Sports on Carrer Alfons I sells a variety of mountaineering and ski equipment and also organizes outdoor excursions.

Where to Stay

The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Avet Blau** has views of the tower and lively Placa de Santa María in a converted 18th-century mansion. In Puigcerdà, which has none of those new, fancy granite and slate resort-style hotels, this is the premier place to stay. Downstairs is an intimate café and restaurant *(Pl. Santa María 14, ☎ 97 288 25 52, fax 97 288 12 12; d 75-90€)*. Almost always full is the terrific **Hostal-Residencia Rita-Belvedere**, which has a great terrace on the edge of the hill, rooms that are laden with glossy timber and a friendly host. Doubles come with full private bath are 45€ *(C/ Carmelites 6-8, ☎ 97 288 03 56)*. **Hostal Muntanya** in the Placa Barcelona has a grumpy hostess and all the charm of an insane asylum *(Avda del Coronel Molera 1, ☎ 97 288 02 02; d 35€)*. **Pensión Campomar's** Jackie the Dog carries around a plastic T-Bone steak and chases her tail faster than the Tasmanian devil. Very friendly owner, rooms that creak, but don't stink. Communal bath *(C/ Major 37, ☎ 97 288 14 27; d 30€)*. Communal bath.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Where to Eat

Restaurant Kennedy in the main plaza has terrace seating and distrusting service. Order the *parillada*, a mixed platter of seafood, for 22€, or veal, or rabbit. Very comfortable chairs but the wait staff rudely counted out our payment in front of us. As Ameri-

cans, we tipped, nonetheless *(Placa Herois 2, ☎ 97 288 11 91)*. **Café de la Placa** serves warm and delicious croissants and good coffee in the morning *(Sta Maria 45, ☎ 97 288 22 00)*. **El Pati de la Tieta** is a pricey but good tavern restaurant serving Spanish food. It's located behind the Pizzeria off Plaza de Barcelona.

■ La Seu d'Urgell

By Pyrenees standards La Sue d'Urgell on the Segre riverbank in the Cerdanya Valley is a large, modernized town with new watersports facilities and even a little traffic congestion. But the old men still gather in large numbers around the Placa de Catalunya each afternoon to sit and stare and perhaps make a few comments about the weather.

The streets of the old quarter, with their archways and medieval palaces, still toy with the imagination. On Tuesday and Saturday a long and lively outdoor market fills these streets around the town's **Catedral**, a Catalan Romanesque treasure dating to the 12th century, adjoining the **Iglesia de Sant Miquel** from the same period.

At one end of the market, stalls are stacked with shoes and lined with clothes racks. Farther along these give way to the butcher stands hung with ham legs and with free sausage samples and wine, then the seafood tables lined with salted fish and, finally, baskets heaped with fresh produce and fruit. The old men are just past here, waiting for their wives to finish shopping.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is on *C/ Valls d'Andorra 33, ☎ 97 335 15 11*. With a rental car, the easiest way to reach La Seu d'Urgell is by **bus**. **Alsina Graells buses** *(☎ 97 335 00 20)* run direct from Barcelona's Estació del Nord and there is also a daily bus linking the town to Puigcerdà. The bus station is on Avda de J. Garriga I Massó, ☎ *97 335 00 20.*

Adventures on Water

In 1992 La Seu d'Urgell got a major boost when it was chosen to host the whitewater competitions of the Olympic Games. The **Parc Olímpic del Segre** immediately south of the old quarter has since been opened up to the public for the enjoyment of watersports. Here a stretch of the Río Segre was damned to create a calm water canal for leisurely floats and a 500-m (1,640-foot) whitewater course with a drop of 6.5 m (21 feet) for rafting, kayaking and hydrospeeding. The ticket office is located in a large bar and terrace restaurant overlooking the river. There you can rent a canoe to float the flat-water canal for an hour (9€), get on the whitewater for an hour or half-hour of rafting (31€/24€) or hydrospeeding (34€/27€). If you choose rafting, you'll have a guide, of course, and be accompanied by five others. Choose hydrospeeding and you're on your own. You fly belly-first down the rapids on a water sled, spinning and twisting along the way. In this short stretch of water, hydrospeeding is far more liberating than the mostly unexciting experience on a raft. *(☎ 97 336 00 92, fax 97 336 01 92, www.parcolimpic.com.)*

Where to Stay

By far the best place to stay in town is the ***Parador*** housed in the 15th-century Convent of Sant Domingo *(C/ Sant Domènec s/n ,☎ 97 335 20 00; d 80-95€)*. A cheaper alternative in the old quarter is the **Hotel Duc D'Urgell** *(C/ Josep Zulueta 43, ☎ 97 335 21 95; d 35-35€)*.

■ Sort & Llavorsí

A stretch of the Río Noguera in the Noguera Palleresa Valley, running past the villages of Llavorsí and Sort, is known throughout Spain for its testy waters. In the springtime with the snowmelt there is no better place in the country to practice the whitewater sports of rafting, kayaking and hydrospeeding on grade four rapids. By late summertime these *aguas bravas* have tamed considerably to a grade of two or even one, but a special dam installed upriver solely for the sport still allows for a few thrills each morning when it is opened up. The dam is proof that the local economies of both Sort and Llavorsí are dependent on the waters and the thrill-seekers they attract.

Sort is the larger of these two villages and for action off the water is the best choice. It is situated on a plain with mountains surrounding it. A few bars, guide shops and restaurants line the main strip through town that runs along the river and behind it a string of medieval streets are worth exploring. Sort, however, is slightly run-down in contrast to its neighbor upriver.

Llavorsí is a lovely little village of granite buildings and slate roofs climbing up the side of the mountain, with the Río Noguera snaking around at the foot of it. It is a sleepy enclave with little to do except follow the hiking trails around the river, watch the fly fishermen seek out the beautiful golden common trout and eat dinner in the evening before nodding off with thoughts of the whitewater descent that awaits in the morning. A small cobblestoned plaza just off the main road through town does have a watering hole, though, and a pool table.

Getting Here

We're now high up in the Pyrenees, which makes it difficult to get around using public transportation. Trains are out. **Buses**, however, do run daily to the village of Sort from La Seu d'Urgell, which is serviced from Barcelona daily by **Alsina Graellas buses** *(☎ 07 335 00 20)*.

Adventures on Water

There are countless whitewater guide services in Sort and Llavorsí; all cover the same stretch of the Río Noguera and charge roughly the same amount. Llavorsí is a 10-minute drive north of Sort and, if you stay in Sort, you'll need to make the trip up for the morning ride, as each of the guide services puts in next to the bridge and campground of Llavorsí. The morning trip is the most challenging, with a succession of rapids bearing names like the washing machine and the angry Moor. It is a trip of 12-16 km (7½-10 miles) that begins around 8 am and lasts roughly two hours, after the equipment has been handed out and the pictures have been purchased. The guide services usually run two more trips during the day, with the last one beginning around 3:30 pm.

The later trips are less thrilling, particularly in the summertime, and as such the guides move farther downriver to float in more scenic areas. During the spring and summer you'll more than likely need to call ahead or sign up for the trip the day before as the spaces go fast. A single rafting trip costs around 30€. At certain times of the year you can sign up for a longer trip of approximately 38 km (23 miles) which lasts all day and includes lunch for around 70€. Hydrospeeding costs between 40€ and 50€. Three hours of kayaking should cost no more than 70€.

Another option is to sign up for a multi-day package with one of the following guide services, which is a better deal if you wish to make more than one trip or experience the different whitewater sports as well as canyoning. These will include accommodations, a few meals and two or more sporting excursions. **Rafting Llavorsí** is the largest guide service in the area, with offices in both Sort and Llavorsí. Their main headquarters is in Llavorsí in a large building across the river from the village *(Camí de Riberies, ☎ 97 362 21 58, www.raftingllavorsi.com).* The friendly guides at **Roc Roi** offer roughly the same excursions. Their office is in the Placa Nostra Sra. De Biuse in Llavorsí with a base on the river just south of the village and well signposted *(☎ 97 362 20 35 or ☎ 97 325 01 31, fax 97 362 21 08, www.rocroi.com, rocroi@rocroi.com).* The guides generally speak both Spanish and English, though it wouldn't hurt to brush up on the basics: *adelante* (forward rowing), *atras* (backwards), *izquierda* (left side), *derecha* (right side) and *alto* (stop!).

Adventures on Snow

The **Estación de Esquí Port Ainé** is located above Rialp, the small village between Llavorsí and Sort *(Avda Flora Cadena 6, ☎ 97 362 03 25, fax 97 362 07 16, www.port-aine.com).* The lifts are usually up and running by early December and stop, depending on the snow, sometime in March. The resort has eight green, four blue, 11 red and five black runs serviced by three chairlifts and six poma-lifts. A single-day lift pass costs 26€ and equipment rentals are available at the base village. The turnoff for the resort is one kilometer (.62 mile) north of Sort on the right. The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Port-Ainé 2000**, credited as the highest hotel in the Pyrenees, has very nice and cozy mountain-styled rooms *(☎ 97 362 03 25).*

Where to Stay & Eat

In Llavorsí, **Pension del Rey** offers new, clean and simple rooms, some with views of the river below (though no balconies) and all with private bath. For 25€ you can also take advantage of the breakfast buffet before setting off to raft *(C/ Santa Ana 7, ☎ 97 362 20 11).* Next door the ☆☆ **Hotel La Moga** is a much more attractive alternative. Rooms with tile floor, simple furnishings and private bath come in twos and fours. The restaurant downstairs is one of the two places to get a meal. It is a pleasant setting with a decent sampling of mountain food and international choices *(Avda Pallaresa 4, ☎ 97 362 20 06, lamoga@muntanyesdelpirineu.com; d 50€).*

In Sort, options include the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Pessets II** *(C/ Diputació 3, ☎ 97 362 00 00, www.hotelpessets.com; d 55-65€)* and the **Pension Les Collades** *(C/ Major 5, ☎ 97 362 11 80; d 40€ w/ private bath).* The stylish **Café Pessets** on the main drag through town has a bar with a good selection of

wines and a small *tapas* and dinner menu at affordable prices *(Comtes del Pallars 29, ☎ 97 362 05 17).*

■ Parque Nacional de Aigüestortesi Estany de Sant Maurici

On the drive in to Espot, the base village of the Twisted Waters and Lake Sant Maurici National Park, there is a small, tempting glimpse of what lies ahead. Roughly midway up the winding road you'll want to stop and marvel at it; an astonishingly powerful waterfall that blasts from the side of a green cliff like a gigantic fire hydrant unleashed to crash almost 100 meters (328 feet) down into the boulder-strewn river below. It is but the first of the park's many thrilling spectacles, among them even greater falls, high ridges cradling cirque lakes carved by ancient glacial activity, lower meadow lakes that have silted in with time and created unique marshlands coursed by the emblematic winding streams that give the park its name and pockets of fir trees that are rarely found elsewhere on the Iberian Peninsula. Concealed within these forests are the Tengalman's owl, the capercaillie and the black woodpecker. Nearing the higher alpine regions where the black pine yields to sheer granite and slate peaks, the ptarmigan and stoat may make an appearance and, with the snowmelt, the marmot will slink out of its caves. For the most part, though, the park's wildlife is notoriously elusive, with the exception of the chamois, which is everywhere, and the occasional shadowy glimpse of what may be a griffon vulture or golden eagle. The main attraction here is the park's remarkably contrasting landscape with its surfeit of water, the abode of common trout, otter, salamanders and the rarely glimpsed but deadly poisonous apse.

Despite the recent development of roads and nearby resorts, the park survives as one of the wild and most secluded mountain zones in the whole of Europe. It was established in 1955 and since expanded to encompass 14,119 hectares (39,500 acres) with a buffer zone of another 26,733 hectares (74,800 acres) characterized by two distinct landscapes. In the shelter of beech, pines and silver birch, the meadows and valleys of the lower zones harbor the *aigüestortes* or twisted waters, often as clear as a perfect diamond or sparkling like an emerald.

The higher zone, loomed over by the park's highest peaks of Els Encantats (2,745 m/9,000 feet) and Montardo (2,833 m/9,292 feet), is marked by the profusion of almost 200 cirque lakes, the most frequented of which is the Estany de Sant Maurici, though it, in fact, is one of the few lakes on the valley floor.

As vehicles are forbidden behind the two main entrance points, the best way to explore the park is on foot or on a guided Land Rover tour from the one of the park's two visitor centers. Rain is a frequent occurrence when it isn't snowing, so plan accordingly and do take advantage of the visitor center staff to get fully briefed before venturing into the wilds. The main visitor center is in the village of Espot at the western entrance of the park *(Prat del Guarda 4, ☎ 97 362 40 36, www.mma.es/parques).* A smaller visitor center is in the village of Boí at the southwestern entrance to the park *(Placa del Treio 3, ☎ 97 369 61 89).* Both are open every day from 9 am-1 pm and 3:30-7 pm.

Getting Here

By Bus: Without your own wheels this takes some work. From Barcelona to Espot you can catch a daily Alsina Graells bus en route to the Val d'Aran. After passing through Llavorsí on the C-147, the bus will stop on the road at the turnoff for Espot. From here, you'll have to walk the seven km (4.3 miles) uphill, or try to flag down a passing car for a hitch. To reach Boí, your best bet is to catch a bus or train from Barcelona to Lleida, and then catch the infrequent bus to El Pont de Suert, which makes a stop at the exit for Boí.

By Car: From Lleida take the N-230 north to Ponte de Suert and just past this village, turn east on the L-500 at the sign for the Cruce de Boí. To access the eastern side of the park, you'll take the N-147 north from Llavorsí and turn west on the LV-5004 for Espot.

Adventures on Foot

Hiking trails in the park are as numerous as the winding streams and just as varied. Hikers of all fitness levels will find a suitable course. The park's main trail cuts a swath through the center of the park from the village of Espot to Boí. The entire hike can be undertaken in a day of just under 10 hours, though many prefer to stick to the short hikes at each end, either from Boí to Estany Llong or from Espot to Estany de Sant Maurici. If coming from the western side of the park, the trail starts at the parking lot next to the information center on the road six km (3.7 miles) north of Boí. From here, it follows the course of the Sant Nicolau River uphill, passing the Estany de Llebreta, the waterfall of Sant Esperit and another visitor center before entering the plains of *aigüestortes* and, after that, the Estany Llong with its mountain *refugio*. From the starting point at the park entrance this stretch takes roughly two hours. Some prefer to leave it at that and head back for Boí. If you intend to hike the whole shebang to Espot, the path climbs to the Portarró d'Espot (pass) beneath the Pic del Portarró (2,729 m/8,951 feet), which takes a little over an hour to reach, and then descends for another hour and half's worth of hiking to the Estany de Sant Maurici (1,900 m/6,232 feet) and the Refugio Ernest Mallafré. From here on it is an easy two-hour trek along the Escrita River to the village of Espot. This last stretch, as well as the entire route, can just as easily be undertaken from Espot.

Adventures on Snow

Skiers have two options in the national park. Near the village of Boí, the **Estación de Esquí Boí Taüll** is a good-sized resort with eight green, seven blue, 19 red and seven black runs serviced by six chairlifts and nine poma-lifts *(Amigó 14-16, ☎ 93 414 66 60, fax 93 209 46 10, www.bouitaullresort.es).* At the eastern end of the park Espot serves as the base village for the **Estación de Espot Esquí**, with one half-pipe, four green, 11 blue, 11 red and five black runs serviced by three chair-lifts and seven poma-lifts *(María Bubí 155, ☎ 93 414 19 26, fax 93 414 27 06, www.espotesqui.com)*.

Where to Stay

There are over 10 mountain refuges scattered throughout the park for hikers and climbers looking to stay overnight. Telephone numbers can be picked up and arrangements made from the two visitor centers at the entrances to the park.

In Espot, the ☆☆ **Hotel Roya** has been around in one form or another for almost 100 years. These days the hotel takes the form of a granite mountain chalet with cozy little rooms offering hardwood floors and great views of the surrounding peaks. There is a comfortable downstairs lounge *(C/ Sant Maurici s/n, ☎ 97 362 40 40, fax 97 362 41 44, d 59€)*. A budget alternative is **Pension La Palmira** with simple doubles and private baths for 33€. The continental breakfast is another 5€ *(C/ Marineta s/n, ☎ 97 362 40 72)*.

Four campsites are gathered around Espot, the closest of which is **Camping Vorapark** *(Ctra Sant Maurici, ☎ 97 362 41 08; 3.83€ per adult, car or tent)*. It offers very few facilities outside of a shower. **Camping Solau** *(Sant Maurici s/n, ☎ 97 362 40 68)* has more facilities but space for only 55 campers. The best choice is either **Soli I Neu** *(Ctra Espot-Lleida, ☎ 97 362 40 01, camping@solineu.com)* or **La Mola** *(Ctra Espot, km 5, ☎ 97 362 40 24)*.

In Boí, options are rather limited. There is the ☆ **Hotel Pey 2** *(Placa Traio s/n ,☎ 97 369 60 36, fax 97 369 61 91; d 55€)* or the **Pension Fondevila** *(C/ Unic s/n ,☎ 97 369 60 11; d 46€)*.

■ Valle d'Aran

A special place is reserved in the hearts of Catalans for the far northwestern corner of the Catalan Pyrenees. Long a favorite French retreat, the historically isolated Valle d'Aran was opened up to great numbers of Spaniards when the Viella tunnel was dug in 1948. Unlike the other valleys of the Catalan Pyrenees, the Valle d'Aran opens to the north, draining its Río Garonne and the various tributaries toward the Atlantic and, until the tunnel was built, leaving its southerly side inaccessible to all but shepherds and bandits coming over from the Spanish side. The climate here is moister and less sunny than the southern-facing slopes of the Pyrenees, creating in this valley the rich green scenery that so attracts Spaniards. No longer isolated, resorts have sprung up throughout the valleys, particularly around Salardú, Bacqueira-Beret and the largest village in the area, Viella. While these large granite, slate and timber resorts do little to complement the natural scenery, they do not stray too far from the appearance of the traditional valley homes. In these, the locals still speak their own language, Aranés, a derivative of Gascon. To them the area is known simply as "the valley."

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is the main information source for the Valle d'Aran. It is at Carrèr de Sarriulera 10 near the old quarter *(☎ 97 364 01 10)*.

Alsina Graells **buses** connect Barcelona with Viella via Lleida on a daily basis. The easiest way to approach the valley is via the N-230 from Lleida, which passes through the long Viella tunnel and then the town, before continuing on to France.

Viella

The capital of the valley, with cheap supermarkets, boutiques and accommodations and a generally cheap appearance, has sold itself out to the French who jump the border for a day of shopping and then return that evening. There is certainly more to do here as far as the social scene is concerned, with a smattering of bars and plenty of average restaurants, but if it is the serene confines of a mountain village you seek, seek it elsewhere.

Viella is at the end of the public transportation line and thus serves as the major jumping-off point for excursions into the valley. While you're waiting, you could check out the town's oldest area, centered around the Placa de Glèis with its **Glèis de Sant Miquèu**, a 12th-century Romanesque construction with later Gothic restorations, and the rustic 16th- and 17th-century buildings scattered around it along the Río Garonne. If you find the Aranese culture interesting, you could stop by the **Musèu dera Val d'Aran** devoted to the archeology, art and ethnography of this long-isolated valley.

Salardú

Heading east from Viella leads to this village and resort. The village part of it, like many of Cataluña's Pyrenean villages, is developed around a Romanesque church, in this case the 13th-century **Glèis de Sant Andreu**. The resort side is all granite stone and slate roof multi-story hotels, chalets and condominiums – all highly attractive, exclusive and costly. Thankfully, while the resort folks bounce from the hot tub to their massage to their gym and venture out only occasionally to snow ski, the old quarter is left relatively peaceful, as it was all along.

Baqueira-Beret

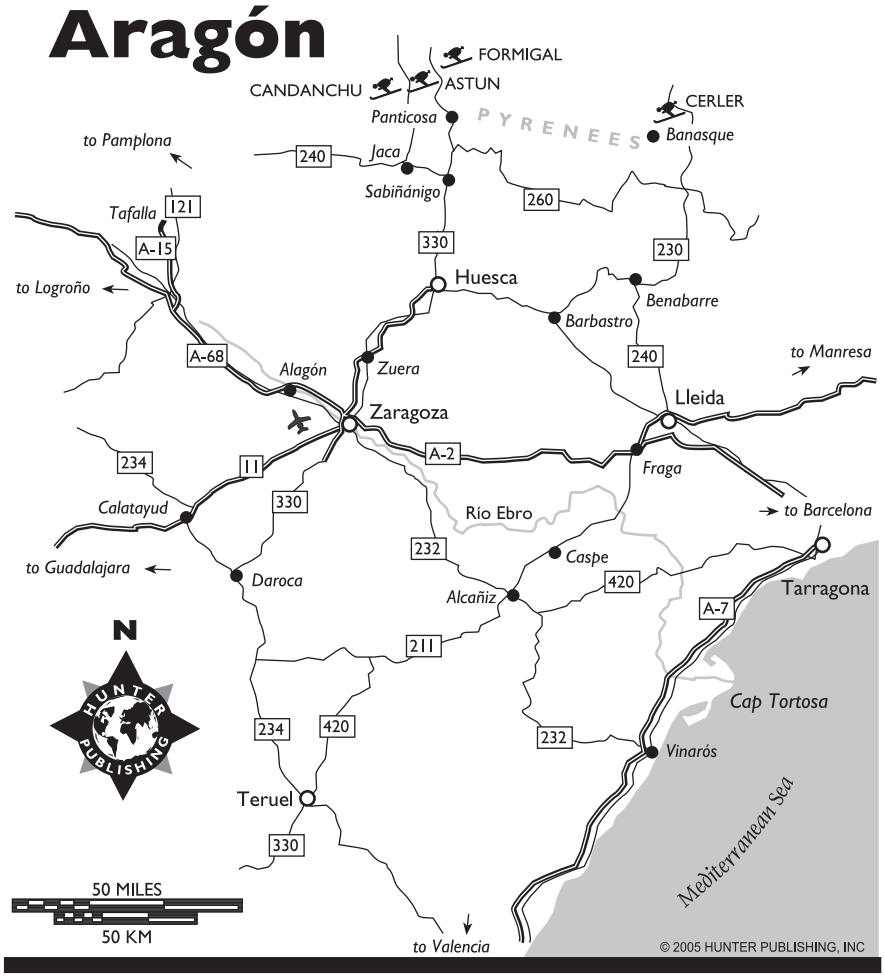
This village is little more than a large ski resort, one that enjoys quite the reputation among French and Spanish alike as the country's premiere snow skiing destination. It is even the favored retreat of the Spanish royalty, which does little to change any opinions on this place. It is ritzy but drab, expensive but not worth it unless you really love to ski and rub shoulders with fur coats.

Adventures on Snow

The ski resort of **Baqueira-Beret** was founded in 1964 by Luis Arias, a champion Spanish ski racer *(Apartado 60, ☎ 97 364 50 62, fax 97 364 44 88, www.baqueira.es)*. It is one of Spain's largest resorts and generally considered the most challenging. The resort is divided into its Baqueira, Beret and Bonaigua sections, with the slope peak at 2,510 m (8,233 feet) and most of the runs scattered above treeline. There are some famous bump runs that are often used for training by the Spanish national ski team and there are also a few gentler cruiser runs. The resort has one half-pipe, four green, 19 blue, 20 red and four black runs serviced by 17 chairlifts and eight poma-lifts. Accommodations are ski in-ski out only on the slopes and very, very pricey. Better to stay in Salardú a few kilometers away. But, if you insist, the ☆☆☆☆ **Chalet Bassibé** offers topnotch accommodations with views of the slopes. Expect to pay anywhere from 150 to 250€ for a double, depending on the season *(Ctra Beret s/n, ☎ 97 364 51 52, fax 97 364 50 32)*.

Where to Stay

Accommodations in Viella include the newly renovated ☆☆ **Hotel Turrull** on the outskirts of town *(C/ Camí Reiau 7, ☎ 97 364 00 58; d 45€)* and the **Pension Casa Vicenta** on the same street, which offers full private bath and television *(C/ Camí Reiau 3, ☎ 97 364 08 19)*. In Salardú the ☆☆ **Hotel Deth Pais** is nice for views, with private bath and adequate service *(C/ Santa Paula s/n, ☎ 97 364 58 36, fax 97 364 45 00; d 65-79€)*. The **Hotel Mont-Rumies** is in the main plaza in the charming old quarter of Salardú *(Placa Major 1, ☎ 07 364 58 20; d 70€)*, while the **Pension Aiguamoix** is nearby with simple rooms that do, at the least, have private bath *(C/ Sant Andreu 12-13, ☎ 97 364 54 96; d 45€)*.



Aragón

The differences between the northern, central and southern regions of Aragón can make a short drive seem like a long, evolutionary trip. Along the way, abrupt changes in scenery, architecture, cuisine and weather are as frequent as tollbooth stops on the *autovía*. In the northern province of Huesca the wild Pyrenees Mountains dominate the landscape, creating a formidable border with France. The winter weather, though severe, is dependable, in contrast to the summer months when any day can bring an unexpected flash flood. Normally clear mountain streams become torrents that plunge down a suc-

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cession of valleys, each home to typical slate and granite mountain villages and locals that have only recently adjusted to the influx of eco-tourists.

History

When the Moors spread across the country during the eighth century they could never penetrate the Pyrenees, though they left quite a legacy in other parts of Aragón. By the ninth century the Christians had begun to reconsolidate in the Pyrenees; they formed the Kingdom of Aragón and made Jaca – today the most popular village among mountain sportsters – their earliest capital. The Romanesque churches scattered throughout the Pyrenees stand as a genteel testament to the devotion and, moreover, determination of these rallying Christians. During the 12th century they had worked their way south into the wide-open landscape of the Río Ebro basin in Aragón's central region. In 1118, under King Alfonso I, they overtook the Moors of Zaragoza, the largest city in the basin.

As throughout Spain during this period, the Moors who remained on the land under Christian domain came to be called Mudéjars. For the next 300 years the many skilled artisans among them merged their traditional Islamic decorative motifs with European architectural techniques with remarkable results. Mudéjar monuments are still evident in Zaragoza, now one of Spain's most modernized cities, starkly contrasting the poor, desolate towns and cities of the south and the culturally isolated ones of the north. But it was in southern Aragón, a sparsely populated, dry region buffeted from Valencia and Castilla-La Mancha by the Iberian mountain chain, that the Mudéjar style truly manifested itself, particularly in the provincial capital of Teruel. That tradition, however, came to an end when Ferdinand II of Aragón married Isabella of Castilla in the 15th century and the Moors were expelled, setting the framework for Spain as a unified, Christian nation.

Zaragoza

The *autovía* between Madrid and Barcelona passes by this city of almost 700,000 people and most travelers do the same. Blame Zaragoza's neglect on its lack of notoriety (a vicious cycle) or simply because foreigners often confuse *it* with a rare vegetable. There may not be great nightlife in this city and there certainly isn't the opportunity for a sunny day at the beach, but, as far as Spanish cities go, Zaragoza is one of the finest, a blend of the traditional Castilian air felt in a metropolis like Madrid and that cosmopolitan Euro-vibe that characterizes Barcelona.

The capital of Aragón is a stylish, highly modernized city wrapped around an old quarter on the banks of the Río Ebro. This area conforms to the original settlement of Caeseraugusta founded by the Romans in 24 BC. The story of 2,000 years can be haphazardly pieced together in a walk across the city's beloved Plaza del Pilar, where Roman ruins stand alongside a tower built by Moors, down from which is a grand Catholic basilica where legends of a miracle by the Virgin Mary continue to attract pilgrims in the know. That, some might venture, is what traveling through Spain or any other country boils down to – knowledge, gleaned through the desire to do and see what most travelers simply pass by.

■ Useful Information

Tourism: The city's main **Oficina de Turismo** is in the Plaza del Pilar *(☎ 97 620 12 00, open every day 10 am-8 pm)*; other offices are at the Torreón de La Zuda *(C/ Glorieta de Pío XII, s/n, ☎ 97 620 12 00)* and in the city Auditorium *(C/ Eduardo Ibarra 3, ☎ 97 672 13 33)*. You can sign up for **guided tours** at any of the offices; the tours begin at 11 am and last three hours, with choices of the Roman, Mudéjar, Goya or Renaissance routes. Tickets for the **tourism buses** can also be purchased at these offices. The **tourist taxi** *(☎ 97 675 15 15)* runs one- and two-hour guided tours of the city with a recorded guide laying it all out.

Adventure Guides: **Sobrarbe** *(C/ Méndez Núñez 31, ☎ 97 620 04 96, www.morillodetou.com, sobrarbesa@terra.es)* organizes mountain expeditions in the province of Huesca. If you plan on heading north from Zaragoza, it may be worth your while to stop by and pick up some info on climbs, rapids and navigable canyons in that province. Daily trips for any of these activities with transportation and lunch range between 25 and 35€.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación Portillo *(Avda Anselmo Clavé, ☎ 97 643 88 29)* can be reached afoot from the Plaza España in under 10 minutes. Walk past the tourism office to your left on Calle Coso and continue ahead as the street becomes Conde Aranda. Pass the Plaza del Portillo and make a left on Paseo María Agustin, then veer right on Anselmo Clave. Daily destinations include **Barcelona** (four hours), **Madrid** (three hours), **Valencia** (six hours), and **Pamplona** (two hours).

By Bus: Zaragoza doesn't have one main bus station, but a number of stops run by private carriers. Each, however, will know when and from where buses to specific destinations depart. For **Madrid** (three hours), **Barcelona** (3½ hours), **Tarragona**, **Soria**, **Valladolid**, **Extremadura** and **Galicia**, catch the **Autobuses Agreda Automóvil** *(Paseo María Agustín 7, ☎ 97 643 45 10)*. Buses to **Pamplona** (two hours) and **San Sebastián** are run by **Conda** *(Avda Navarra 81, ☎ 97 633 33 72)*. Buses to **Bilbao**, **Santander** and **León** are run by **Viajes Viaca** *(C/ Pignatelli 120, ☎ 97 628 31 00)*.

By Car: The N-II is a straight shot by car northeast from Madrid. To reach Logroño and Pamplona, head northwest on the A-68; for Pamplona, turn north after Tudela on the A-15/N-121. Huesca is north of Zaragoza on the N-330. From Barcelona, take the N-II west as far as Lleida and there pick up the A-2 running west. From Teruel, take the N-234 north as far as the N-II, which you take east.

■ Festivals

The **Fiesta de la Virgen del Pilar** is the biggest party of the year, celebrated by the entire region in October with an offering of flowers, costume dress, street processions with giants and big-headed figures and nightly fireworks. The patron **San Valero** is celebrated on January 29, while **San Jorge** has his day on April 23.

■ Sightseeing

Zaragoza's **Casco Viejo** spans the south bank of the Río Ebro between the Puente de Santiago and the Puente del Pilar; the focal point of activity in this old quarter is the grand **Plaza del Pilar**, easily located one block south of the river between the Puente de Santiago and Puente de Piedra. Don't waste your time wandering around the north bank, as it is basically a residential subdivision that has sprung up during the past 20 years. The **Plaza de España** serves as a landmark in defining the Casco Viejo from the other, more notable neighborhood that sprung up south of it during the 19th and 20th centuries. The main streets of this later area radiate from the **Plaza Paraiso**.

Around the Plaza del Pilar

This oblong plaza extends along the riverbank from the Plaza de Cesar Augusto to the Plaza de la Seo, encompassing a spectacular range of monuments ranging from Roman times to the present. The **Plaza de Cesar Augusto** on the western end preserves remains of the original **Muralla Romano** (Roman Wall), the 15th-century Mudéjar **Torreón de la Zuda** and the 17th-century Baroque **Iglesia de San Juan de los Panetes**.

The Plaza del Pilar is focused around the **Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar**, to the right of which is the 20th-century **Casa Consistorial** (town hall) and the Renaissance **Palacio de la Lonja**, a former commodities exchange constructed in the 16th century. At the far end, the **Plaza de La Seo** is recognizable by the glass cube erected to showcase further Roman excavations. Facing this plaza is the **Catedral de San Salvador** and to the left of it the 18th-century Neo-Classical **Palacio del Arzobispo**.

Basílica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar

The leading monument of Zaragoza, this mammoth Baroque temple was constructed in the 17th century in honor of the Virgen of El Pilar, patroness of the Hispanic world. The Virgin's miniscule 15th-century wooden image, the *Sagrado Imagén*, is displayed on a jewel-laden pedestal in the Camarín del Virgin in the basilica's *Capillo Santo* (Holy Chapel). The marble pillar known as *la columna* is said to have protected the church when bombs were dropped on it during the Spanish Civil War. According to legend, the Virgin Mary appeared atop the pillar to the Apostle Saint James in 40 AD, endowing the stone with miraculous properties that have since manifested themselves and inspired devout visitors to rub it smooth with kisses.

A glance up and around reveals bright frescoes and cupolas painted by both Goya and his brother-in-law Francisco Bayeu. Among them is the beautiful *Queen of the Martyrs*, depicting the Virgin Queen hovering amid angels and Arogonese saints in the dome of the north aisle. For an angel-like high, an elevator leads to the top of one of the basilica's four towers where there is an aerial view of the city.

Museo Pilarista houses the gifts that have been bestowed on the Virgin of the Pilar since the 16th century, including the ornate mantels on which she is rotated and her bejeweled robes. The sketches by Goya were used in formulating his plans for the basilica's decoration. *(☎ 97 629 95 64, open 9 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm.)*

Catedral de San Salvador

Otherwise known as La Seo, the city's main cathedral is a showcase of styles that evolved during its construction between the 12th and 18th centuries. The earliest examples are its Romanesque apse, followed in later centuries by the addition of the stunning Mudéjar Capilla de Parroquieta (Parish Chapel), the Gothic altarpiece, a Neo-Classical portal and the Baroque tower, which encases the Moorish minaret once belonging to the mosque that was demolished on this spot. The **Museo Tapicería** displays a fine collection of Flemish tapestries. *(open Plaza de la Seo, ☎ 97 629 12 38, open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm, Sun. 10 am-noon and 4-6 pm).*

Roman Ruins

With a little imagination it is still possible to visualize the rectangular site of the original Roman town of Caesaraugusta, established by the emperor in 24 BC in the area of the Plaza del Pilar. The **Museo Foro Romano de Caesaraugusta** shelters excavations in the Plaza de la Seo of a Roman market dated to 19 BC during the time of Caesar Augustus and a town forum built in the first century AD. *(Plaza de la Seo s/n, ☎ 97 639 97 52, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm. Tickets for all three museums, 3.80€, are purchased at this location.)*

The **Museo de las Termas Públicas de Caesaraugusta** preserves the remains of the Roman city's public baths *(C/ San Juan y San Pedro 3-7, ☎ 97 629 72 79, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*, and the **Museo del Puerto del Río Caesaraugusta** reveals an extension of the town forum dedicated to trading on the banks of the Río Ebro *(Plaza de San Bruno, ☎ 97 639 31 57, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*. To reach the ruins of the **Teatro Romano**, follow Calle Don Jaime I south from the Plaza de la Seo (away from the river) and make a left on Calle Veronica.

Palacio de la Aljafería

What was originally an Islamic palace dating to the ninth century has since undergone extensive expansion and restructuring at the behest of subsequent Catholic rulers. Much of the earliest fortified structure is preserved, however, including the golden niche of the Mihrab where the Arabs prayed, and the ornate Palacio Taifal with its beautiful open-air courtyard and pool surrounded by a lavish arcade of plaster latticework. With the reconquest of Zaragoza in the 12th century under Alfonso I, the Islamic palace made way

for churches and the Mudéjar palace of Pedro IV, of which a few stately halls remain. Once the Christian Reconquest was completed in 1492 a new palace was built in the Mudéjar style to honor the Catholic King and Queen and soon thereafter an extensive refurbishment was undertaken to fortify the complex, including the construction of the defensive wall, with its pentagonal bastions at each corner, and the creation of a moat. Today the immaculately restored palace is the seat of the Cortes of the Autonomous Community of Aragón. *(Open April 15-Oct. 15 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, closed Thurs. and Fri. morning. Rest of the year, Mon.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 4-6:30 pm; closed all day Thurs. and Fri. morning, Sun. 10 am-2 pm. Guided tours at 10:30 am, 11:30 am, 12:30 pm, 4:30 and 5:30; entry adults 3€, students 1€.)*

Museums

Museo de Zaragoza: Otherwise known as the archeology and fine arts collection, this museum's ground floor displays prehistoric relics along with Roman mosaics and coins dated to the city's founding in 25 AD, while a vast holding of Gothic altarpieces and a room devoted to the work of Francisco de Goya can be found on the upper floors. On hand are court paintings of Carlos IV and a decked-out Ferdinand VII, a depiction of Saint Francisco Javier's martyrdom and a glowing rendition of the Virgin of the Pilar held on high by angels and surrounded by flying cherubs. In addition to Goya's oils on canvas, there is an interesting series of etchings with aquatint on hollow metallic plates depicting the *Disasters of the War,* as well as the lithographic *Bulls of Bordeaux* on calcareous stone. *(Plaza de Los Sitios 6, ☎ 97 622 21 81, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

The other half of this museum consists of an **ethnology and ceramics collection** housed in the Parque de Primo de Rivero. *(☎ 97 655 37 26, open Tues.-Sat. 9 am-2 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

Museo Pablo Gargallo: The immaculate 17th-century Palacio de Los Condes de Arguillo houses a singular collection of bronze sculptures, engravings and drawings. A series of placards and photographs describe Pablo Gargallo, the early 20th-century Araganese sculptor responsible for their creation. *(Plaza San Felipe 3, ☎ 97 672 49 23, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm).*

Museo Camón Aznar: Named for the Zaragozan intellectual and donor, this museum holds paintings from the 15th to 20th centuries representing a broad range of schools. Most seek out the hall devoted to a series of etchings by Goya. *(C/ Espoz y Mina 23, ☎ 97 639 73 28; open Tues.-Fri. 9:15 am-2:15 pm and 6-9 pm, Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 6-9 pm.)*

Museo Pablo Serrano: The old workshops of the Provincial Hospital now display the work of the contemporary Aragón sculptor Pablo Serrano. Serrano, who died in 1985, had a penchant for recreating in sculpture works on canvas by illustrious Spanish painters of the past. Other spaces are devoted to paintings of his wife, Juana Francés. *(Paseo María Agustín 20, ☎ 97 628 06 59; open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm.)*

■ Adventures on Foot

With nice weather and time to kill, one option is to share a picnic or toss a frisbee in the **Parque de Primo de Rivera**. The city's main public park is a green escape with plenty of trees, manicured gardens and fountains south of the modern center. An impressive

crisscrossing staircase forms the backdrop for the statue of Alfonso I El Batallador, credited with recapturing the city from the Moors and honored with this park. From the Plaza Paraiso, catch the bus or walk down Paseo Gran Vía and make a left when you see the stream that leads to the park.

Another option is to do the Spanish *paseo* (stroll) on the sidewalks along the Río Ebro; there are plenty of grassy knolls for rest along both banks.

■ Shopping

Shopping in the Casco Viejo is centered primarily on **Calle Don Jaime** and **Calle Alfonso I**, with a mix of boutiques, small clothing stores and souvenir shops. The designer fashion-shopping district is **Paseo de la Independencia**. On Sunday mornings the options multiply. **El Rastro flea market** is held outside the bullring and there you may find priceless antiques or just a bunch of junk; Plaza San Francisco hosts a **stamp and coin exchange**; there is an **antique market** in Plaza San Bruno and a starving **artists show** in Plaza Santa Cruz.

■ Where to Stay

The **Posada de Las Almas** *(C/ San Pablo 22, ☎ 97 643 97 00, fax 97 643 91 43, d 35-45€)* occupies a 300-year-old inn in the western side of the Casco Viejo near the Mercado Central. A stay in modern Zaragoza doesn't get more countrified, or for that matter old-fashioned, though any claustrophobics should steer clear. Subtle Mudéjar accents, as well as private televisions and bath, set the place apart from any old hostel.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

Hotel Tibur *(Plaza de la Seo 2-3, ☎ 97 620 20 00, fax 97 620 20 02, d 75€)* is in the heart of the Casco Antiguo near the major sights and the character-laden brick streets of old Zaragoza. The rooms and public spaces are classically styled but far from overdone or fancy. Some might say they are comfortable and adequately equipped with the standard amenities such as private bath, television and thin walls. Comparison shoppers will love the relationship between price and location, not to mention the view of the basilica del Pilar from its balconies.

Hostal Cataluña *(C/ Coso 94, ☎ 97 621 69 38, fax 97 621 08 03, d 45€)* warrants a promotion to at least one-star hotel status, but we don't mind as long as it keeps the price down. This hostel is more expensive than most, but in exchange you'll get supportive mattresses, sparkling private bathrooms and not once be made to deal with a nosy proprietor. The hostel is off Plaza de San Miguel on the southeastern edge of the Casco Viejo. **Hostal Santiago** *(C/ Santiago 3, ☎ 97 639 45 50)* is close to the Plaza del Pilar. You won't write home about its rooms, but each does have private shower or bath. A double ranges from 30-50€. **Camping Casablanca** *(C.N.-II Madrid-Barcelona, km 316, ☎ 97 675 38 70)* is off the main highway running past Zaragoza, exit #316 at the signs for the Barrio de Valdefierro. Buses running into the city stop nearby; it's a 15- to 20-minute trip one way. The site has the basics: a

grocery store, café, showers and bath, gas and electrical hook-ups and telephones. The charge is 4.07€ each for adults, tents and cars.

■ What to Eat & Where

Aragón cuisine isn't fancy or even all that flavorful, but it is dependably backed by the freshest of products from the garden (check out the selection at the Mercado Central on Avda César Augusto) and the variety. A healthy dish unique to the region will include *borage*, a vegetable grown along the Río Ebro that has a notably fleshy stem. It is most commonly boiled with potatoes and dressed with oil and vinegar, though it may come as a salad (*ensalada*) or fried in a mixture of beaten eggs, sugar, flour and olive oil (*crespillos).* You'll no doubt come across snails *(caracoles*), a local favorite, chicken in a tomato, red pepper and ham sauce (*pollo en chilindrón)* and the succulent cured *jamón Serrano* from Teruel. Other dishes that don't consist of meat or potatoes include *bacalao ajoarriero* (a salted cod crumbled, fried in garlic and mixed with beaten eggs, potatoes, onions) and *trucha a la molinera* (fresh trout pan seared with olive oil and sprinkled in lemon juice). The Aragonese satisfy their sweet tooth with the traditional *frutas de Aragón*, candied pieces of fruit dipped in chocolate. You'll be able to find these sweets on the popular *tapear* street of Calle Don Jaime I (*tapear* is going out for traditional Spanish snacks around 2 and 10 pm) and just about anywhere else in town as well.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

The restaurant of **La Posada de Las Almas** *($$, C/ San Pablo 22, ☎ 97 643 97 00)* serves traditional Aragón cuisine like the *migas*, a country dish of stale bread soaked in water and fried, *borrage con patatas* and *conejo salmorrejo*, rabbit spruced up with onion, garlic, flour, various herbs and spices and – perhaps not ironically – carrots. A competent *menu del día* costs around 10€. But it's the old-world atmosphere of the place (it was built in 1705) that makes the food seem delicious, even though it's far from the best the city has to offer.

The best the city has may well be **La Bastilla** *($$$$, C/ Coso 177, ☎ 97 629 10 81)*, a stylishly decorated restaurant on the ground floor of a former convent. The creative menu includes steamed hake loin in an oil of fig and polenta and roast kid glazed with cinnamon and garlic. The *bodega* represents a sampling of the finest Spanish wines and on Thursday nights the restaurant celebrates its Las Noches de La Bastilla by pushing an affordable tasting menu.

Others swear by **La Ontina** *($$$$, C/ Joaquín Costa 5, ☎ 97 621 45 75)*, a top-notch restaurant known and loved for its modern Mediterranean-oriented cuisine. **Casa Pascualillo** *($$, C/ Libertad 5, ☎ 97 639 72 03)* serves up standard regional fare without flare but at good prices in the tempting atmosphere of a historical home cum restaurant in the Casco Antiguo. The *comedor*, or dining room, is upstairs and there you can try out the three-course menu of the day for under 15€ or just hang out in the bar and lounge area downstairs sipping wine or beer and munching on *tapas*.

The Aragón Pyrenees

The Pyrenees Mountains of Aragón comprise the heart of this impressive range separating Spain from France in its skyward thrust from the Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean Sea. Where the eastern and western flanks of the range descend in the neighboring regions of Cataluña and Navarra, creating gentler landscapes more tolerant of human activity, the mountains of Aragón reach for the heavens in a grandiose setting of alpine extremes and isolation rarely equaled in the country. In its northernmost heights, Aragón claims the highest peaks in the Pyrenees, some of which are still capped by the last surviving Spanish glaciers. These are an undeniable lure to climbers and alpinists and guaranteed to put a smile on any naturalist's face. You can look above to see eagles, falcons and vultures carving the sky or below to the lush valleys descending through fields of wildflowers tramped by chamois, wild boar, roe deer and backpackers. These valleys shelter ruined villages that have long since been deserted and others that have profited tremendously from the surge of interest in the outdoors during the last 20 years. Aínsa, Benasque and particularly Jaca serve as gateways into the wildest reaches of the Aragón Pyrenees and the plentiful snow skiing, hiking, canyoning and whitewater opportunities that await. *This section begins with descriptions of the most common adventure sports in the Aragón Pyrenees and the best areas to practice them. The main villages and natural parks are discussed toward the end.*

■ Points to Consider

The weather is notoriously undependable in the Pyrenees, particularly during the late summer months when torrential downpours can buffet the range unexpectedly, swelling rivers and rendering narrow, winding roads more treacherous than usual. Use caution, come prepared for the worst with your equipment and provisions and, if plans are in the works for serious outdoor excursions, check the weather conditions beforehand by contacting the **Federación Aragonesa de Montañismo** *(C/ Albareda 7, 50004 Zaragoza, ☎ 97 622 79 71, fax 97 621 24 59, www.pirineos.net/fam, fam@pirineos.net)*. Members of this organization can also supply invaluable information on most, if not all, outdoor sports in the mountains.

> **TIP:** If your plans for the Pyrenees include as many adventure sports as possible, consider signing on for a package deal with one of a number of adventure companies operating out of the main villages described below. These packages can last as little as one night and include discounted accommodations, food and guided trips for sports such as canyoning or rafting.

■ Adventures on Water

Alquézar & the Sierra de Guara

Locals swear that the sport of canyoning was created in the Sierra de Guara of the Aragón Pyrenees. What is for certain is that the conditions of the **Parque Natural de la Sierra y los Cañones de Guara** are prime for the sport, perhaps the best to be found in

Europe. Throughout the park a series of clear blue rivers snaking beneath the peaks has carved an incomparable natural playground of narrow gullies, ravines, tunnels, waterfalls, caves, hidden pools and cliffs. On any given canyoning trip – and there are numerous choices, depending on your skill and the time of the year – you'll be asked to ford, swim through, jump over, rappel and slide down these obstacles. A 20-foot free-fall into a deep pool may not sound challenging but, considering that the rock you'll be jumping from is rounded and slick and the watery target sandwiched between two jagged limestone walls with only three feet separating them, the stakes are raised considerably.

Apart from base-jumping, abseiling in the Guara canyons is one of the most thrilling adventures in the country, a sport that merges the skills of hiking, mountaineering, swimming, diving, climbing and rapelling in an afternoon that can be enjoyed by almost anyone, regardless of athleticism. Though experienced canyoners often go it alone or in private groups and either rent or bring their own equipment, a novice and, for that matter, anyone with just a few canyoning trips under his or her belt would do best to sign on with an adventure company. They provide the transportation, the equipment and above all the know-how and where to fully enjoy the sport.

Useful Information

While the village of Rodellar is closest to the canyon action, most travelers prefer to stay in Alquézar. Surrounded by an ancient defensive wall and guarded by the ruins of a castle, this peaceful medieval abode has managed to parlay its proximity to the Guara canyons into a sizable tourism infrastructure. The crush of summertime tourists and the construction of new buildings on the outskirts has done little to spoil the mood set by its original rustic stone dwellings with their sun-bleached barrel-tile roofs. This old quarter is gathered around the village's only church, the 16th-century **Colegiata de Santa María**. During the summer months, an *oficina de turismo* is open at the southern entry to the village *(C/ Arrabal s/n, ☎ 97 431 89 40)*.

Getting Here

By Car: From Huesca, by car, take the N-240 east in the direction of Barbastro. You can either turn north after passing Angües or continue on to Babastro and from there connect to Alquézar.

By Bus: The easiest way to get to the village via public transportation is to catch a bus from Zaragoza or Huesca to the Barbastro stop on Avda del Ejército *(☎ 97 431 12 93)*. **Autocares Cartés** *(☎ 97 431 15 52)* runs an afternoon bus between Barbastro and Alquézar Mon.-Sat.

Adventure Guides

It seems everyone in Alquézar ought to profit from the canyoning industry. The main guide services operate out of the village's hotels and campsites and each rents neoprene, helmets, harnesses and the other necessary equipment even if you don't want to use their guides. Expect most canyoning trips to last around six hours and cost 35-40€. During the high season, the trips are frequently booked, so call in advance. It makes little difference which company you choose, as they all charge the same prices and frequent the same canyons, namely Cañon de la Peonera, Cañon del Río Vera, Masún Superior,

Gorgas Negras and a few others. The main companies in town are **Avalancha** in the Hotel Santa María *(C/ Arrabal s/n, ☎ 97 431 82 99, www.avalancha-guara.com, info@avalancha-guara.com)*, **Compañia Guaraqua** in the Alberque de Guara *(C/ Arrabal s/n, ☎ 97 431 83 96, www.guaraqua.com)* and **Escapadas, S.L.** *(C/ San Gregorio 5, ☎ 97 431 83 54, fax 97 431 83 54)*. In the village of Rodellar, try **Guara Naturaleza y Aventurea** *(☎ 97 421 00 10, www.guara-mascun.com, guara@guara-mascun.com)*, a company that has been in the canyoning biz since Carter was president.

Where to Stay

If you've come to Alquézar strictly for canyoning, check around as many of the accommodations offer a discounted package that includes lodging, meals and guided canyoning trips.

Both **Hotel Santa María** *(C/ Arrabal s/n, ☎ 97 431 84 36, fax 97 431 84 35, www.hotel-santamari.com, info@hotel-santamaria.com)* and ☆☆ **Villa de Alquézar** *(C/ Pedro Arnal 12, ☎ 97 431 84 16, www.villadealquezar.com)* have cozy accommodations with private baths and spectacular panoramic views of the surrounding valley.

Cheaper alternatives include the **Albergue Rural de Guara** *(☎ 97 431 83 96, www.guaraqua.com, quaraqua@guaraqua.com)*, a recently built country-style manor with a bar and restaurant, and **Pensión Narbona** *(☎ 97 431 80 78, www.pirineo.com/fonda-narbona)*, with basic rooms and an open-air restaurant that serves *paella* and roast meats.

Camping Alquézar *(☎ 97 431 83 00, www.alquezar.com, campings@alquezar.com)* is 800 m (2,625 feet) south of the village on the highway *(carretera)* to Barbastro. The site has a small grocery store, café and basic cleaning facilities. The alternative is **Camping Alquézar Río Vero** *(☎ 97 431 83 50, www.pirineo.com/camping.rio.vero)*, on a shady riverbank at the end of the Río Vero canyon. Though smaller, this site has more facilities and better views. Prices for both are around 3.50€ per adult, car or tent.

■ Adventures on Whitewater

Four of the rivers in the Aragón Pyrenees have areas of what the locals call *aguas bravas*, literally "brave waters." These are rapids perfect for the whitewater sports of rafting, kayaking and hydrospeeding. Grades can go as high as four, though if you don't hit the rivers up in the springtime with the snowmelt they'll have dwindled in places to two or one and in others to bedrock.

Each of the rafting services offers a choice of the *aguas bravas* or the family-friendly *aguas tranquilas*, the latter usually along more scenic routes. Generally during the summertime, when the water is low the wildest ride is on the morning trip, after dams created specifically for the sport are opened upriver. Things usually chill out by the afternoon trips, but the warmth of the sun is a positive in the chilly water. In the summertime try to reserve places at least a day in advance.

Guides

The favored spot among whitewater thrill-seekers is on the Río Esera north of the village of Graus. **Eseraventura** *(C/ Barranco 25, ☎ 97 454 00 07, www.eseraventura.com)* runs trips up to the river from this village on a daily

basis, with choices of rafting (30€ per two hours), kayaking (40€ per half-day) or floating down the river belly-first, hydrospeeding (40€ per two hours). These are the going rates for virtually every tour operator in the Pyrenees.

The Río Ara has two stretches of whitewater, one north of the villages of Torla and Broto, the other south of them. Rafting companies operate out of both villages. In Torla, try **Campañia Guías de Torla** *(C/ Ruata s/n, ☎ 97 448 64 22, www.guiasdetorla.com)* or in Broto **Grupo Explora** *(C/ Santa Cruz 18, ☎ 97 448 64 32, www.grupoexplora.com)*. These companies also run trips to the whitewaters of the Río Gallego, west of Broto and Torla on the road between the villages of Biescas and Sabiñánigo. The final option is on the Río Cinca north of Aínsa. This village is stacked with tour operators, one of which is **Aguas Blancas** *(Avda Sobrarbe 4, ☎ 97 451 00 08, www.augasblancas.com)*. For more information, contact the **Federación Aragonesa de Piragüismo** *(C/ Padre Marcellan 15, 50015 Zaragoza, ☎ 97 673 12 36)*.

■ Adventures on Horseback

A 300-km (187-mile) circuit known as the Gran Ruta de Hipica (Great Equestrian Route) winds through the Aragón Pyrenees for the benefit of horse lovers. The route is well sign-posted throughout, though most riders prefer to explore only part of it as the whole shebang can take a week or longer. The major Aragón mountain villages of Aínsa and Graus are along the way, as well as smaller ones, including La Ribargorza, El Sobrarbe, Benasque and Plan.

Guides

The trail can be accessed from any of these villages and, from most, guided horseback tours are available. In Aínsa, **El Trío** maintains a stable with over 20 horses *(C/ Santa Tecla 2, ☎ 97 450 07 52, www.pirineo.com/eltrio)*. Their guided horseback excursions can last from one hour (12€) to a week (600€ includes guide, room and board). For more information, contact the **Fedración Hípica Aragonesa** *(C/ Padre Marcellán 15, 50015 Zaragoza, ☎ 97 673 09 04)*.

■ Adventures on Foot

Mallos de Riglos

Northwest of Huesca, the tiny village of Riglos serves as a base camp for some of the best **rock climbing** in the Aragón Pyrenees. The Mallos de Riglos, a red-colored rocky conglomerate rising to over 300 m (984 feet) that looks like giant tombstones in places and silos in others, overshadows the village. The site was the subject of a rarely seen film, *The Mountains of Yesterday*, which chronicled climbers' attempts to top the last of the Riglos peaks not yet conquered. The escarpment has over 200 bolted routes, both vertical and overhanging, and they are generally solid.

To reach Riglos, drive northwest from Huesca to the town of Ayerbe; you'll make a right roughly two km (1.3 miles) after Ayerbe at the signs for Riglos-Murillo de Gállego.

Guides

The **Mountain Refugio Riglos** at the entrance to the village is run by the mountaineering federation of Aragón; its staff can supply beds, advice, equipment and guided ascents on the popular routes of Mallo la Visera and Mirador de los Buitres *(☎ 97 623 55, fax 97 623 64 39)*.

■ Adventures in the Air

Castejon de Sos

If the chance to fly strikes a sweet-sounding chord, Castejon de Sos in the Valley of Benasque is the place to be. Locals even refer to the village as the *Paraiso de Parapente*, the Paradise of Paragliding. You can decide for yourself after a 20- to 30-minute fall of almost 1,500 m (4,920 feet). A flight school in the village offers paragliding courses (but only for Spanish speakers) and tandem flights available to everyone for 80€. The launch site is roughly 45 minutes outside the village on a mostly unpaved road, but the guides will drive you to the spot or point the way if you've come with experience and equipment. The school, **Volar en Castejón** *(Avda El Real 28, ☎ 97 455 35 04, www.volarencastejon.com)*, is on the main strip and open from May to October.

To reach the village take the N-240 east from Huesca to Barbastro, then pick up the N-123 running northwest to Graus. From Graus, head north to Santa Liestra and at Campo continue north on the N-260. For further information contact the **Federación Aragonesa de los Deportes Aéreos** *(F.A.D.A., C/ Cosa 34, 50004 Zaragoza, ☎ 97 621 43 78, fax 97 621 43 79, fada@public.ibercaja.es.)*

Hostal Residencia Plaza *(Avda Real, ☎ 97 455 30 50, fax 97 455 38 15, www.aneto.com/hostalplaza.com)* is down the road from the flight school. A heated double with private bath costs 26-40€.

■ Adventures on Snow

Five of the top downhill ski resorts in Spain are in the Pyrenees mountains of the Huesca province. Four are clustered together in the northwest of the province directly north from the city of Huesca along the French border. The other, Cerler, is in the far northeast mountains.

If you can ski the huge resort of Candanchú, Spaniards say, you can ski anywhere in the world (how many times have we heard that one?). To support the statement, the resort has 19 black runs of the highest difficulty, more than any of the neighboring resorts, and 17 red runs challenging enough for above-average skiers; there is also a half-pipe and the chance to ski Astún with the same pass. Astún is a smaller resort down the valley with a preponderance of above-average red runs.

Formigal is cruiser heaven, though the runs are occasionally criticized for being too short and there is no half-pipe to keep snowboarders in their own playpen.

Panticosa has been expanding rapidly with new runs and the installation of more lifts, including a gondola; for true challenges get off-piste, otherwise the runs are for beginners and intermediates.

All by its lonesome in the northeast is Cerler, a family-oriented resort with plenty of cruisers but a lack of moguls and, thankfully, long lines.

Candanchú

This resort, at 1,560-2,400 m/5,117-7,872 feet, has a half-pipe, nine green, 10 blue, 17 red and 19 black runs serviced by six chairlifts and 19 poma-lifts. An adult pass costs 27€ for a day or 18€ for a half-day *(☎ 97 437 31 92, fax 97 437 31 94, www.candanchu.com, inf@candanchu.com).*

☆☆ **Hotel Candanchú** *(☎ 97 437 30 25, fax 97 437 30 50, www.hotelcandanchu.com)* is a chalet by the slopes, with small, characterless rooms that can seem extra stuffy with all that skiing equipment lying around. During the ski season doubles costs as much as 80€. Larger and cheerier rooms are available at **Hotel Edelweiss** *(Estación de Esqui Candanchú, ☎ 97 437 32 00, fax 97 437 32 00, www.edelweisscandanchu.com).* They're yellow, if that doesn't bother you, and equipped with heating, television, private bath and telephone. Prices range from 50€ to 85€.

Astún

At 1,700-2,300 m/5,576-7,544 feet, this resort has a half-pipe, two green, seven blue, 13 red and seven black runs serviced by four chairlifts and 11 poma-lifts. A one-day adult pass costs 28€ *(Valle de Astún, ☎ 97 437 30 34, fax 97 437 32 95, www.astun.com, astun@astun.com).*

The N-330 runs north all the way from Huesca to the resort of Candanchú, a distance of approximately 70 km (44 miles). A bus run by Autobuses Alosa-Zaragoza departs Zaragoza at 6:30 am, Huesca at 7:12 am, Sabiñanigo at 7:52 am, Jaca at 8:10 am and arrives in Canfranc at 10:05 am. Trains on the Zaragoza-Huesca-Canfrac line depart Zaragoza at 7:35 am, Huesca at 9, Jaca at 11 and arrive in Canfranc at 11:33 am.

The ☆☆ **Hotel Europa** *(Estación de Esqui, ☎ 97 437 33 12, fax 97 437 33 61)* is the main accommodation on the slopes, but unless you're dead set on skiing yourself to sleep, the slopes can get rather boring at night.

Consider staying in Jaca for a better nightlife or Canfranc to be as close as possible, with choices including the **Hotel Villa Anayet** *(Plaza Aragón 8, ☎ 97 437 31 46, fax 97 437 33 91, d 87€)* and the cheaper **Regugio Sargantana** *(C/ Abareda 19, ☎ 97 437 32 17, fax 97 437 21 04).*

To reach Astún from Huesca, drive north on the N-330 to Jaca and then follow the signs north to Astún. Astún can be reached via the same bus and train lines that service Candanchú.

Formigal

The resort is at 1,510-2,250 m/4,952-7,380 feet. It has no half-pipe, four green, 13 blue, 24 red and 11 black runs serviced by one gondola, six chairlifts and 16 poma-lifts. *(Urbanización Formigal s/n, ☎ 97 449 00 49, fax 97 449 02 31, www.formigal.com, fsa@formigal.com.)*

Hotel Villa de Sallent *(Urbanización Formigal, ☎ 97 449 02 23, fax 97 449 01 50, www.hotelvillasallent.com)* is a posh new chalet with sleek walnut furnishings and moody lighting. Prices range from 100-200€ per night, depending on the season. A cheaper alternative but still with a degree of style itself ☆☆ **Hotel Tirol** *(☎ 97 449 03 77, fax 97 449 01 99).*

To reach Formigal from Huesca drive north on the N-330; at Saniñánigo get off the N-330 and continue north to Biescas, from which you'll see signs for Formigal farther north. The **Bus Blanco** departs Zaragoza from Paseo María Agustín 12 at 7 am, Huesca from Avenida Juan XXIII at 7:45 am and reaches Formigal at 9 am. The return bus leaves Formigal at 5 pm *(☎ 97 644 11 43; 39€ round-trip)*. The train on the Zaragoza-Huesca-Jaca line will only get you as close as Sabiñánigo, 25 km (15½ miles) south of the resort, from where you'll have to catch a taxi or the early morning bus run by Alosa *(☎ 97 448 00 45)*.

Panticosa

At 1,500-2,200 m/4,920-7,216 feet, this resort has no half-pipe, four green, 14 blue, 16 red, and four black runs serviced by one gondola, six chairlifts and seven poma-lifts. A one-day adult pass costs 24€ *(Edificio Telecabina, ☎ 97 448 71 12, fax 97 448 74 55, www.panticosa-loslagos.com, ven@panticosa-loslagos.com)*.

Hotel Morlans *(☎ 97 448 70 57, fax 97 448 73 86)* has simple accommodations with wood floors, wood ceilings and, not surprisingly, wood furniture. Each of the rooms has private bath and television and there's also a sauna to rest weary bones. Doubles cost 32-49€.

Panticosa is very near to Formigal and serviced by the same train and bus lines. From Huesca, it is a 1½-hour drive north on the N-330 through Sabíñanigo, then on to Biescas before reaching the resort.

Cerler

The resort (1,500-2,630 m/4,920-8,626 feet) has no half-pipe, six green, 15 blue, 14 red and three black runs serviced by nine chairlifts and seven poma-lifts. *(Telesilla B-1, ☎ 97 455 11 11, fax 97 455 16 17, www.cerler.com, nieve@cerler.com.)*

Of the two hotels in the village, **Hotel Monte Alba** is the nicest, a large modern hotel with plenty of rooms that fill up during the season *(☎ 97 455 11 36, fax 97 455 14 48, www.cotursa-hotels.com)*. **Hostal Casa Cornel** *(C/ El Obispo 11, ☎ 97 455 11 02, fax 97 455 28 38, www.casacornel.com)* from the outside looks like a two-story Motel 6 that has been resurfaced in granite. In truth, it's far more appealing than any Motel 6. A double in the high season with breakfast is just 25€ and yet the rooms still have private baths.

From Huesca, head east on the N-240 to Barbastro, then on to Graus. In Graus turn north for Campo and in that village pick up the N-360 north to Castejon de Sos, exit and continue north to Benasque, the town nearest to the resort. It's a little more tricky to reach the resort on public transportation. During the high season daily buses run from Zaragoza and Huesca in the early morning, but times and departure points change. For bus service from Huesca, contact ☎ *97 421 07 00*; for service from Zaragoza, ☎ *97 622 93 43*.

■ Jaca

It seems a faux pas to come to the ecologically driven town of Jaca in the Aragón Pyrenees without some kind of outdoor adventure in mind. To fit in, particularly during the busiest winter and summer months, you may want to step into a pair of hiking boots, wear fleece, or throw a helmet on your head and a climbing rope over your shoulder. That's not to say that Jaca is all action and no attraction; its valley setting with snow-capped peaks all around

is ideal. Beyond the contemporary resort buildings the old town is built up around a fairytale fortress and a beautiful early Romanesque church, the latter built in the 11th century when Jaca served briefly as the first capital of the Kingdom of Aragón. In the evenings around the terrace restaurants you'll notice turtlenecks beneath sport coats and sense that many of the people in town came not for rafting or climbing, but for wine and cheese and a mountain road trip – or just to blow off some steam after a day on the slopes. Jaca is a designer Pyrenees town, a crossroads where it has become fashionable to hire an adventure guide and head out of town; that said, it is still just as cool to stay put and smoke a pipe.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is on Avda Regimiento de Galicia at the corner of the Paseo de la Constitución *(☎ 97 436 00 98)*.

Getting Here & Away

The N-330 runs north from Huesca to Jaca. For **trains**, the Estación de Ferrocarril is at the end of the Avda Juan XXIII that runs from the Avda de Francía on the eastern side of the Ciudadela; it's a 10-minute walk from the Ciudadela. Jaca is a frequent daily stop on the train line running through Huesca from Zaragoza. Daily **buses** arrive from and depart for Huesca and Zaragoza in the Plaza de Biscos *(☎ 97 435 50 60)*.

Adventure Guides

Because of its situation, Jaca has become a popular base-camp for travelers interested in mountain sports, namely snow skiing, rafting, canyoning, climbing and mountaineering. To find equipment, advice or guides for every outdoor sport imaginable, walk down the Avenida Regimiento de Galicia, where the majority of shops are located. These include **Alcorce Pirineos Aventura** *(#1, ☎ 97 435 64 37, www.alcorceaventura.com)*, **Evasión Rafting** *(#21, ☎ 97 436 35 21)* and **Mountain Travel** *(☎ 97 435 57 70)*. Jaca also has an ice skating rink that has hosted the World Championships of Professional Artistic Skating a couple of times. On most days the rink will be open to the public.

Sightseeing

The center of town is immediately southeast of the citadel, with Calle Primer Viernes de Mayor running north-south and Calle Mayor perpendicular to it.

The **Catedral** *(C/ San Pedro, ☎ 97 435 63 78, open 10 am-1 pm and 4-8 pm)* is the pride of Jaca, an unassuming 11th-century Romanesque construction that makes the historical buildings it is sandwiched between seem unremarkable. The graceful austerity of its original styling and the slight French influence stands despite later remodeling. A portal leads into the interior, though to see it you may need to deposit 50 centimos in the coin box to light the place up. The chapels make for a decorative path to the *claustro* (cloister), where you will find the **Museo Diocesano**. The large number of tourists in Jaca has apparently justified the museum curator's fleecing of representative religious art from other Pyrenean churches. It is an

impressive collection of frescoes dating from the 12th-century Romanesque period to the 15th-century Gothic, along with various religious paintings and sculptures. *(Open Tues.-Sun. 11 am-1 pm and 4-6:30 pm.)*

The **Ciudadela** *(Citadel, Primer Viernes de Mayo, ☎ 97 436 04 43)* was constructed under King Felipe II during the 16th-century religious wars with the French Huguenots. The star-shaped fortress, complete with a now-grassy mote and imposing battlements, still serves as a military base, though guided tours are available 11 am-noon and 6-8 pm.

While Jaca was the first capital of the Kingdom of Aragón, the **Monasterio de San Juan de la Peña**, left, in a high mountain pass 23 km (14.3 miles) away, is recognized as the true religious and administrative cradle of the kingdom. Sandwiched in a cave beneath a natural rock eve, the Monasterio Viejo (old monastery) was founded by hermits sometime during the ninth century. As pilgrims began to shuffle past it on the Aragón trail to Santiago de Compostela, the site acquired greater significance and a Romanesque church was built in the 11th century above the original monastery and church. The old monastery preserves the tombs of the earliest kings of Aragón – Ramiro I, Sancho Ramírez and Pedro I – as well as a replica of the Holy Grail. Along with the legend that the monastery was founded after a hunter had fallen off a cliff only to land at the mouth of the cave in perfect health, it is reputed that the original Holy Grail was once sheltered here. After a fire, a newer monastery was built up the road from the original, but it has since been closed down due to poor management and bad political choices. The walk up is not wasted, however, as the visitors' center is located next to it along with a *mirador* with splendid mountain views.

Getting to the monastery takes a concerted effort if you don't have a car. The easiest option outside of catching a **taxi** *(☎ 97 436 28 48)* and forking over 15-20€ each way is to catch the **bus** from Jaca in the Plaza de Biscos that is headed to Pamplona and mention to the bus driver that you need to get off in the village of Santa Cruz de la Seros. From this village the monastery is still a trek of 1½ hours uphill to the Sierra de la Peña. Try hitchhiking or follow the GR 65.3.12 trail (identified with white and red stripes) to the top. The monastery is generally open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 4-8 pm. *(☎ 97 434 81 95, entry 3.50€ includes access to the Iglesia de Santa Cruz de la Serós in the village on the main road.)*

Where to Stay

Hotels and hostels are prevalent in the center of the village, particularly around Calle Mayor and Paseo de la Constitución. One of the fancier choices in town is the ☆☆☆ **Gran Hotel** *(Paseo de la Constitución 1, ☎ 97 436 09 00, fax 97 436 40 61)*, with fully stocked, classically styled rooms. A double costs 65-80€.

Hotel La Paz *(C/ Mayor 39, ☎ 97 436 07 00, fax 97 436 04 00, d 35-45€)* occupies a typical mountain *casa* in the oldest part of town. The rooms are a little too cozy, but still adequately furnished and not tastelessly decorated.

Hostal Paris *(Plaza de San Pedro 5, ☎ 97 436 10 20)* is the one establishment that every town seems to have: it's stood the test of time, is a little worse for wear, but is usually full and entertaining the same guests year after year. A mostly young clientele doesn't seem to mind sharing bathrooms. Doubles are 25€.

The **Albergue Juvenil de Esuelas Pias** *(Avda Perimetral 6, ☎ 97 436 05 36)* offers the cheapest accommodations in town, though during the high season you may need a Hosteling International card to reserve one of the bunk beds. Light sleepers bring ear plugs, or muffs.

■ Aínsa/L'Aínsa

This medieval village rests on a hill overlooking the confluence of two of the Aragón Pyrenees' wildest whitewater rivers, the Ara and the Cinca. The nearby Parque de Ordesa has also helped to put Aínsa in the spotlight and its picture-perfect cobbled streets and old-world residences have done the rest. As a result, the village is usually teeming with tourists during the summertime and peak winter months, but don't let that be a deterrent. There is energy in Aínsa that is lacking in many of the Pyrenees villages and certainly it is among the prettiest of its neighbors. A walk up the cobbled hill to the 12th-century medieval quarter leads to a wonderful arcaded Plaza Mayor sided by the ruins of an 11th-century Castillo, not far from which is the 12th-century Iglesia de Santa María and, at frequent vantage points, terrific views of Ordesa park way off in the distance.

Useful Information

To reach Aínsa, head north from Huesca on the N-330 as far as Sabiñánigo and pick up the N-260 that runs north to Biescas before it turns east. A daily **bus** run by **Hudebus** *(☎ 97 421 32 77)* goes from Sabiñánigo to Aínsa each morning, with stops in Biescas and Torla along the way. During the summertime the **Oficina de Turismo** is down the hill from the old quarter on *Avenida Pirenáica, ☎ 97 450 07 67*. The rest of the year an office is open in the Plaza Mayor.

Adventure Guides

Many of the multi-adventure companies in Aínsa specialize in excursions into Ordesa park. Whitewater sports are another prime objective and mountain biking is common around the village. **Sarratillo 24** *(Avda Pirenaica 11, ☎ 97 450 07 25, www.sarratillo.com)* rents mountain bikes at 7€ for two hours and also offers equipment and/or guides for cross-country skiing, caving, canyoning and whitewater rafting or kayaking. **Aguas Blancas** *(Avda Sobrarbe 4, ☎ 97 451 00 08, www.aguasblancas.com)* specializes primarily in whitewater trips, though they will arrange for paraglides, climbs and a variety of other excursions. Rafting trips range from 28-35€ for a morning or afternoon float.

Where to Stay

Smack dab in the center of Aínsa is **Posada Real** *(Plaza Mayor 6, ☎ 97 450 09 77, fax 97 450 09 53, www.pirineo.com/posadareal)*. The shell of the building, at least, is as old as the Plaza (many, many centuries); the interior has been tastefully decorated in a typical alpine manner with plenty of rough-hewn wood and stone. Equally cool is the **Casa El Hospital** *(Arco del Hospital 1, ☎ 97 450 07 50)*, which dates from the turn of the 19th century and offers wood-scented rooms and friendly folk at the front desk. The place is basically a *Casa Rural*, but you won't need to reserve in advance and stay for multiple nights. Just one night and it's 35€. A newer addition down from the old quarter is **Hotel Apolo** *(C/ Pineta 2, ☎ 97 450 08 88, fax 97 450 08 36, www.pirineo.com/hotel_apolo)*,

which has chalet-style rooms with fireplaces and lounge areas. There's a cocktail bar for a hot toddy and a restaurant serving mountain fare. Doubles cost 37€. "Mountain fare," by the way, is characterized by lamb, fried breadcrumbs known as *migas,* and trout. **Camping Aínsa** *(Ctra Aínsa-Campo km 1, ☎ 97 450 02 60, fax 97 450 02 60)* is one kilometer (.6 mile) outside of town in El Pueyo de Araguás. The site has river access, a supermarket, cafeteria and also rents cabanas and mountain bikes. Spaces for an adult, tent or car each cost 4.03€.

■ Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido

Not long after the Spanish government established its first national park in the Picos de Europa in 1918, it turned its sights on this rare set of glaciated valleys and limestone massifs on the Aragón border with France. Since, the park has not been very successful in improving the prospects of the endangered Spanish ibex, which was its purpose, but it has become the favored summertime destination of outdoor enthusiasts in the Aragón Pyrenees. As its name suggests, the main feature of this magical 38,568-acre expanse is the valley of Ordesa, a long swath of green that winds through sheer calcareous rock walls like a waterslide from the base of Monte Perdido. At 3,355 m (11,400 feet), this "Lost Mountain" is said to be the highest limestone massif in Europe; on its northern face is the French Cirque de Gavarnie, a botanical paradise in and of itself.

Hiking and nature observation are the main activities in the park, though some prefer to laze in its rivers and waterfalls. Others come prepared to scale the heights of Monte Perdido or one of the park's two other peaks, Marbore (3,328 m/10,916 feet) or Ramond (3,262 m/10,699 feet). Together, they make up Las Tres Sorores (the three sisters). Along with Ordesa, three more valleys extend from Monte Perdido like the spokes of a misshapen wheel. They are Añisclo, Pineta and the Garganta of Escuaín. The valleys are dominated by beech and fir trees, the prolific Pyrenean chamois (a grotesque creature), wall creepers (like moths, only prettier) and herds of deer and wild boar – the latter being the most obvious of the park's over 200 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. A rare sight here but virtually unseen anywhere else in the world is that of the Spanish ibex, of which only 15 are thought to remain, and the bearded vulture, which has dwindled to some 60 breeding pairs.

Useful Information

The village of Torla just southwest of the Valle de Ordesa is the main access point into the park. From it a road runs a short ways to the main entrance, past the **Centro de Visitantes** *(☎ 97 448 64 21, open April-Oct. 9 am-2 pm and 3:30-6 pm)* on the left side and ends at the parking lot at Pradera de Ordesa. There is a smaller park information office in Torla and another open solely during the summertime *(Avda Ordesa 4, ☎ 97 448 61 25)*. Both offices can supply trail maps and arrange guided SUV tours.

Getting Here & Away

By **car** the N-330 runs north from Huesca to Sabiñágo and on to Biescas, from which the C140 runs east to Torla. The **train** from Huesca to Jaca will get you as close as the village of Sabiñánigo,

but from there you'll need to catch the bus to reach the park. **Buses** run by **Hudebus** *(☎ 97 421 32 77)* depart at 11 am (and again at 6 pm during the summer), returning from Torla at 3:30 pm. The same company runs a bus from Aínsa at 2:30 pm, but it doesn't return until the next day. Once in Torla, a shuttle runs every 15 minutes to the park from June-Sept. The rest of the year you can drive, walk the five km (3.2 miles) to the entrance or catch a taxi for around 5€.

Adventure Guides

Aragón Aventura has been on the outdoor sports scene around Ordesa since 1980. The company's headquarters are in Gavín *(Ctra Ordesa, s/n, ☎ 97 448 53 58, www.aragonaventura.es)*, but it keeps a base open during the high season in Torla *(C/ Ruate, ☎ 97 448 64 55)* that specializes in climbing, hiking and canyoning excursions. Another multi-adventure company is just down the road, **Campañia Guías de Torla** *(C/ Ruata s/n, ☎ 97 448 64 22, www.guiasdetorla.com)*.

Adventures on Foot

Because it is the prettiest of the valleys and easiest to access, **Ordesa** sees the most hikers and has the best trails. Most are signposted from the Pradera de Ordesa. By far the easiest and most used is the trail to the **Circo Soasa**, a natural amphitheater carved by quaternary glacial activity that has a fair-sized waterfall known as the Cola de Caballo. There are two ways to go about it, though for the easiest you'll need to retrace your steps in return. This way follows the north bank of the Río Arazas from the parking lot via the GR-11 Trans-Pyrenean trail (identified by white and red marks) past a number of waterfalls; the whole trip lasts four to five hours. The more rewarding, albeit more difficult, choice is to cross over to the south side of the Río Arazas from the Pradera de Ordesa and follow the signs up the steep Senda de los Cazadores to a shelter and a *mirador* overlooking the river. After this hearty ascent of an hour, the route levels out and descends on the Faja de Pelay, one of the natural balconies carved high on the park's valley walls by erosion. The cirque marks the end of the Ordesa valley and from it either continue back along the trail running along the northern bank of the river or go up, up and away on the more devilish switchback trail that leads to the **Refugio de Góriz** *(☎ 97 434 12 01, open year-round)*. The mountain refuge serves as a base camp for the more daring hikers making the ascent to Monte Perdido, though you'll need to call well in advance during the summer to reserve a pad. That route takes around two hours to reach the Lago Helado, or frozen lake, and another hour to make the summit.

A second option is the hike to the **Circo Cotatuero**, which offers an interesting twist on the sport of mountaineering at the end. From the Pradera de Ordesa follow the trail along the northern riverbank and, after a few minutes, turn north at the signs for the cirque. The trail winds around for two hours before reaching the foot of a mammoth waterfall. At this point there are two options, go back or press ahead by way of an ingenious set of iron rods. To return to the Pradera de Ordesa, take the sign-posted path to the Circo de Carriata along a high stone pathway and follow its descent to the starting point (approx. five hours all told). To continue you'll need to climb 13 *clavijas*, iron rods driven into the rock wall of the cirque over a hundred years

ago for the use of sporting folk. Having braved the strange assault, the trail leads another two to three hours to the mythical Brecha de Rolando, a breach in the mountain frontier with France said to have been created by the nasty sword of Roland.

Where to Stay

Torla has plenty of accommodations from hotel-quality right down to plank wood floors. ☆☆ **Villa de Torla** *(Plaza Nueva 1, ☎ 97 448 61 56, fax 97 448 63 65)* is one of the nicer choices in the center of town. Rooms are heated and outfitted with satellite television and private bath. Doubles cost 42-56€. Not quite as appealing is **Hostal Ballarín** *(C/ Capuvita 11, ☎ 97 448 61 55)*, with doubles from 30€. Cheaper still are the **Hostal-Residencias Alto Aragón** *(C/ Capuvita 11, ☎ 97 448 61 72, d 28-34€)* and **Bella Vista** *(Avda de Ordesa 6, ☎ 97 448 61 53, d 32-42)*, both of which offer private baths and average food.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

There are two youth hostels in the village, **Alberque Lucien Briet** *(C/ Francia s/n, ☎ 97 448 62 21, fax 97 448 64 80, www.refugiolucienbriet.com)*, offering beds in six-person rooms for 7€, three-bed rooms for 25€ and double rooms for 30€, and **Albergue L'Atalaya** *(C/ Francia 1, ☎ 97 448 60 22)*. Breakfast is an additional 3€ and dinner 10€ at both places.

Camping

Save for bivouacking (quick camps set up for a single night) in the highest areas of the park, camping is not permitted within its boundaries. A number of sites are located around Torla, the closest of which is **Camping Ordesa** *(☎ 97 448 61 46, fax 97 448 63 81, www.staragon.com/campingordesa.com)*. The site is one kilometer (.6 mile) south of the village on the *carretera* to Huesca. **Camping Río Ara** is, as its name suggests, on the riverbank just outside of town *(C/ Lavatuero s/n, ☎ 97 448 62 48)*. **Camping San Antón** is a few kilometers from the park entrance on the paved road running from Torla to the parking lot inside the park grounds *(Ctra Ordesa, ☎ 97 448 60 63)*.

■ Valle de Benasque, Benasque

The easternmost valley of the Aragón Pyrenees is one of the mountain chain's wildest, a remarkably diverse landscape harboring chamois, marmots, the spectacular capercaille and curious *Homo sapiens* looking to get off the beaten path and test their primitive side. The defining features of the valley fall into the bounds of the Parque Natural de Posets-Maladeta, which claims more than 50% of the Pyrenean summits over 3,000 m (9,840 feet), including the chain's two highest, the Macizo de Maladeta's Aneto (3,408 m/11,178 feet) and Posets (3,371 m/11,057 feet) – both are irresistible targets for climbers but notoriously nasty on occasion. The valley cuts a lush green swath south between these two massifs; in the summertime, when the undependable weather is not threatening, hikers will be treated to an endless array of wildflowers. Farther south the scenery mellows out, making

way for a series of villages including Benasque, the largest. This landscape is a stark contrast to the high, northernmost reaches, with their icy lakes and Europe's southernmost glaciers, said to be melting away at such a rate that they will have disappeared by the time our grandchildren discover the valley.

As far as Pyrenees villages go, **Benasque** is not of the quaint, romantic or monumental variety. There are some old cobbled streets in there somewhere, but any remnant of a fanciful past has been submerged in a sea of modern resort chalets catering to a moneyed crowd. The largest village in the valley may not be a draw in and of itself, but its natural surroundings are. As the posh set rubs shoulders and sips liqueur into the wee hours of the morning, the sporting crowd hits up the taverns and chugs beer with other plans in mind. Along with the nearby ski resort of Cerler, serious hikes and the boldest climbs in the Pyrenees are just a short jaunt from Benasque and adventure guides have lined the streets to capitalize on them.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** *(C/ San Pedro s/n, ☎ 97 455 12 89)* in Benasque is open year-round and supplies the brochure *Plan de Excelencia Turística* detailing 15 of the most popular hikes in the area and six trails for mountain bikers.

Getting Here

By Car: To reach Benasque and the other villages of the valley by car, you'll need to pass through Graus and then take the A-139 north. From Zaragoza, head north on the N-330 to Huesca, then turn east on the N-240; after passing Barbastro, turn north on the N-123 to Graus. From Lleida, take the N-230 north and at Benabarre turn west for Graus.

By Bus: **Alta Aragonesa** *(☎ 97 421 07 00)* runs daily buses from Huesca and Lleida to Graus and Benasque.

Adventure Guides

The main focus of the adventure companies in Benasque is the ascent of Anesco. Hiring a guide and equipment should cost no more than 50€. Canyoning, whitewater sports, paragliding and biking are alternatives. Two of the many companies are **Equipo Barrabés** *(Ctra de Francia s/n, ☎ 97 455 10 56, www.barrabes.com)* and **Compañía de Guías Valle de Benasque** *(Edificio Ribagorza, Avda de Luchón 19, ☎ 97 455 13 36, www.guiasbenasque.com)*.

Adventures on Foot

You will find a wealth of challenging options by walking north on the A-139, which runs parallel with the Río Ésera from Benasque. The faint of heart or knobby-kneed should avoid the strenuous hike to the pass of **Portillón de Benasque** (2,445 m/8,020 feet), a trail blazed to France during the Middle Ages by pilgrims and the smugglers who sought to rob them. The first leg of this route, however, leads to options for other sports. From Benasque, walk north on the A-139 for approximately nine km/5½ miles (you'll cross the river two times) and take the dirt track to the right signposted for La Besurta – you'll know you've passed it if the blacktop of the A-139 turns to dirt, which it does approximately three km

(1.8 miles) later. From the A-139 it's a 15- to 20-minute walk to the **Pllan del Hospital** *(Pllan del Hospital s/n, ☎ 97 455 20 12, fax 97 430 68 66)*, a **cross-country skiing** resort with accommodations in a restored 17th-century hospital-refuge, a ski school and equipment rentals. During the wintertime, three circuits totaling 30 km (18 miles) are groomed. A one-day pass is 5.20€ and a double room in the nice *Hospedería* costs 57€.

From the resort, a demanding trail runs north to the pass, which takes fit hikers a good three hours to complete. To attempt the death-defying climb of the Pyrenees' two highest peaks, **Maladeta** (3,308 m/10,850 feet) and **Pico de Aneta** (3,404 m/11,165 feet), you'll need to continue on the dirt road from the skiing resort for approximately three km (1.8 miles) to reach the little shack at La Besurta. From there, a trail is signposted to the **Refugio La Renclusa** *(☎ 97 455 21 06)*, another 30-45 minutes uphill. The mountain refuge is staffed by experienced climbers and usually accommodates the same hardened sort of characters; after a good night's rest you will set out in the early morning to attempt one of the two summits, each of which will take the better part of an afternoon. It's advisable to call ahead to make arrangements for accommodations and climbing equipment.

A less strenuous option is to pick up the GR-11 long-distance trail that traverses the whole of the Pyrenees from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. The trail crosses the A-139 roughly six km (3.6 miles) north of Benasque around the Puente de San Jaime over the Río Ésera. To head west on the trail, look for the white and red markings just north of the bridge and turn left. A hike on this well-worn and generally easy path leads through the Valle de Estos to the mountain **Refugio de Estós** in two to three hour's time. From the refuge, the trail continues on and doesn't stop until it reaches the ocean. The eastern arm of the GR-11 can be picked up just before the bridge. This trail follows the course of the Río Ebro as far as the Valle de Cregüeno before turning southeast. The mountain **Refugio Pescadores**, a fisherman's shanty, is two hours farther up the trail and used as a base for hikers exploring a group of clear cirque lakes nearby.

Where to Stay

Hotel Aragüells *(Avda de los Tilos 1, ☎ 97 455 16 19, fax 97 455 16 64, d 38-55€)* is typical of the Pyrenean mountain resorts, with a gloomy granite façade and slate roof. The rooms on the upper floor are more appealing, with varnished wood ceilings and the best views of the surrounding peaks. The hotel is located at the entrance to the village near the ski resort of Cerler. In the center of town, **Hostal Solana II** *(Plaza Mayor, ☎ 97 455 10 19)* rents out simply furnished rooms with heat, private bath and television for 40€ per night.

Two refuges outside of Benasque are mentioned above in the hiking section if you really want to get away from it all. **Hospital de Benasque Hospedería** *(Camino del Hospital, ☎ 97 455 20 12, fax 97 455 10 52)* is a restored 17th-century pilgrim's hospital offering well-furnished rooms accented by granite and rough-hewn timber in the mountain style. **Refugio La Renclusa** *(☎ 97 455 14 90)* is a simple affair and the choice among hikers and climbers making the ascent to the top of Aneta.

Camping

Ixeia *(Ctra Barbastro-Francia, km 100, ☎ 97 455 21 29, www.ctv.es/users/ixeia)* is three km (1.8 miles) north of Benasque off the A-139 on the Río Ésera. The staff is knowledgeable about the surroundings and willing to supply information, guides or equipment for mountain biking, hiking or climbing. Adults, tents and vehicles each cost 3€ per night. **Camping Aneto** *(Ctra Francia, 3.5 km, ☎ 97 455 11 41, fax 97 455 16 63, www.anetocamping.com)* is a larger site with more facilities than Ixeia (it costs .60€ more per night).

■ Teruel

> *"If you're looking for a sweetheart in Teruel, be sure she's a stranger to the town, for the women who come from there, will kill a man with love."* Camilo José Cela, *Journey to the Alcarrin*

The capital of Aragón's sparsely populated southern province settles a dry, sun-scorched plain on the banks of the Río Turía not far from the mountains of the Sistemo Ibérico. When the Moors were driven from these mountains and their military outpost Alcañiz in the 12th century, many filtered south to seek refuge in Teruel. For three centuries the Moors co-existed with Christians and Jews, during which time their Islamic artistic traditions fused with European styles to create the ornate Mudéjar architecture for which Teruel is famous and has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The skill and creativity of these artisans is evidenced in the city's churches and its towers, which utilize simple and affordable materials like brick and ceramic to create highly ornamented structures with an oriental appeal. The popularity of the style has since spread throughout the country and in many cases is still being utilized in what is known today as the Neo-Mudéjar style.

Most of Teruel's Mudéjar monuments miraculously survived one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the Spanish Civil War. During the early years of the war Teruel formed a crucial arm of the Second Republic. Seeking to divide the loyalist region, Franco's troops attacked and captured the city in 1937, only to lose it again in a Republican counterattack two months later. In short order the Nationalist troops returned with a reinforced detachment and took the city permanently. When it was all over, the three-month ordeal had cost the lives of over 30,000 troops and all but ensured that the Nationalists would win the war.

Useful Information

The **tourism office** in the Plaza de la Catedral offers maps of the city and recommendations for excursions in the surrounding province *(☎ 97 860 22 79)*. Another office is located at Calle Tomás Nogués 1 *(☎ 97 860 22 79)*.

Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación RENFE is west of the Plaza Carlos Castel *(Camino de la Estación, ☎ 90 224 02 02)*; from the plaza, walk down the Calle El Salvador, passing through the Torre del Salvador and then over the strange Neo-Mudéjar pedestrian bridge known as Escalinata. Daily destinations include **Madrid** (five hours), **Zaragoza** (2½ hours) and **Valencia** (2½ hours).

By Bus: The Estación de Autobuses *(Ronda de Ambeles, ☎ 97 860 10 14)* is a five-minute walk east of the Plaza Carlos Castel (Plaza del Torico). To reach it, walk past the street on the left side of the blue Casa de Tejidos El Torico and follow Calle Hartzenbusch through the Plaza Juderia to the Ronda de Ambeles, where you'll make a right. Daily destinations include **Zaragoza** (2½ hours), **Barcelona** (six hours) **Cuenca** (three hours), **Valencia** (two hours) and **Madrid** (four hours).

By Car: To reach the coastal cities of Castellón de la Plana or Valencia by car, take the N-234 southeast and pick up the coastal road A-7 either north for the former or south for the latter. From Madrid, take the A-III southeast, at Tarancón head west on the N-400 to Cuenca, pick up the N-420 still heading west and when it T-bones with the N-330 turn north. From Zaragoza, drive south on the N-330 to Daroca and there pick up the N-234 running south.

Festivals

In February the city folk dress up in medieval garb and celebrate the ill-fated wedding of Isabel de Segura during the **Fiesta de Los Amantes**. Like Juliet, Isabel died after her lover had done the same. In July, **La Vaquilla del Angel** (the Angel's Heifer) celebrates the founding of the city with street festivities and a smaller version of Pamplona's Running of the Bulls. According to tradition, Teruel was populated after a bull calf stopped on the site, looked up at the stars, and began to moo.

Sightseeing

Teruel's **Casco Antiguo** is small and easily explored; around it, remnants of the old wall still serve to delineate it from the new quarter, the most curious of which is the 16th-century **Acueducto de Los Arcos**, which also served as a viaduct in connecting the old quarter with the new. Surrounded by sleek 19th-century Modernist edifices like the cheery blue **Casa de Tejidos**, the **Plaza de Carlos Castel** is the action center of the old quarter. The plaza is more commonly referred to as the *Plaza del Torico* because of the bull and star perched on a tall column in its center; both are symbols of the city which you'll see adorning many of its Mudéjar monuments, all of which are just a few blocks in any direction from the plaza.

ARCHITECTURE AS ART

When the Christians had completed their reconquest of Spain, the Moors who stayed on the peninsula were allowed to retain their religion, laws and customs. These people, called Mudéjars, are responsible for the uniquely Spanish style of architecture that is at its best in Teruel. Mudéjars were renowned as skilled craftsmen and artisans. Working under Catholic rule, they fused European Christian architecture with Arabic styling using cheap and readily available materials like plaster, polychrome woods, ceramic tiles and bricks. A brick wall alone might have appeared monotonous. But these artisans would lay them out in a herringbone pattern and add embellishments such as geometric forms, stars, plant motifs and a variety of archways; thus the Mudéjar craftsmen's *horror vacui* (literally fear of blank space) was dealt with in style.

Teruel boasts the richest assemblage of Mudéjar architecture in Spain, inspiring its reputation among some as the country's greatest open-air museum. The churches and towers of Teruel exhibiting this style date from the 13th to 16th centuries and it was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986. The grandest example of the skilled Moorish artisans working under Christian influence is the **Santa María Catedral**, built between the 13th and 16th centuries. Its *torre* (tower) is square in the Christian tradition but broken down into sections and decorated with a series of motifs unique to the Mudéjars – conjoined arch windows, green ceramic tile accents and a frieze composed of intersecting arches – atop which is an octagonal bell house. The interior ceiling is breathtaking. The coffered wooden marvel is fundamentally Mudéjar with touches of Gothic; corbels support the beams and an extensive assortment of decorations, including geometric shapes, Arabic inscriptions, wildlife motifs and human figures representing saints, royalty and lay folk, relay a beautiful story of life during the Middle Ages.

The **Iglesia de San Pedro** two blocks away also dates to the 13th century and evokes the Mudéjar tradition. As with the Catedral, this church wears sawtooth brickwork, ceramic tile accents and numerous rounded archways. A portal allows pedestrians to pass through the tower, which rises above the **Mausoleo de los Amantes** (Mausoleum of the Lovers). It is said that the remains of Teruel's legendary lovers reside in this space designed by Juan de Avalos; their alabaster representations lie in repose, eternally holding hands over a vase of carnations.

A Kiss of Death

A staircase leading off the Paseo de Óvalo bears one of the city's many bas-reliefs detailing the death of Teruel's most famous lovers, **Diego de Marcilla** and **Isabel de Segura**. Their legend has all the trappings of a winning Shakespearean play. Diego, so it goes, was a peasant with a heart of gold who fell in love with Isabel, a beautiful siren from a wealthy family. Not surprisingly, Isabel's parents disapproved of their daughter's love for Diego, but granted the peasant five years to prove his worth to the family and thus gain Isabel's hand in marriage.

Seeking fame and fortune in hopes of bringing honor to the wealthy family, Diego left Teruel and did not return until exactly five years later – or what he thought was exactly five years. To his horror, Isabel had married another man just the day before he returned. Seems old Diego had miscalculated by not including his day of departure as part of the five years. He was one day too late and, when he finally managed to find his old lover, she refused his request for one final kiss. Heartbroken, Diego fell dead in his tracks. During his funeral the following day Isabel is said to have approached his coffin, upon which she leaned over, kissed the deceased and fell dead herself. Isabel had given Diego the kiss in death that she had refused him in life and Teruel thus acquired its nickname as the *Ciudad de los Amantes* (City of Lovers). The lovers were reunited in the Iglesia de San Pedro, where their alabaster tombs depict the two sleeping contentedly and holding hands eternally.

Rounding out Teruel's Mudéjar monuments is the **Torre de San Martín** and the **Torre del Salvador**. Both towers are 14th-century constructs and emblazoned with row upon row of pointed-arch and semi-circular windows, herringbone brickwork and ceramic arrows, checkering, octagonal stars and columns.

Teruel's **Museo Provincial** *(open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-2 pm)* is housed in the beautiful 18th-century Renaissance Palacio de la Comunidad, one block east of the Catedral . Exhibits date to the prehistoric age, though the emphasis seems to be on ethnographical themes like traditional crafts, dress and industry, along with a smattering of artistic relics.

Dinópolis, with over 9,000 square meters (10,764 square yards) devoted to paleontology laid out in an amusement-park style meant to attract kids, is said to be the largest prehistoric funhouse in Europe. Its attractions include a mock Jurassic forest, an IMAX theater and tons of model dinosaurs. *(Open July-Aug. 9 am-10 pm, June-Sept. 10 am-8 pm, Oct.-May Thurs.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm; entry 16€.)*

Adventures on Foot

Serious cavers will find the **Sima de San Pedro de los Griegos** near the village of **Oliete** (pop. 700) more than satisfying. The mouth of this mammoth chasm is roughly 95 m (312 feet) in diameter, allowing sunlight to penetrate the full 120 m (394 feet) down to the subsurface lake filling a grotto below. This freak of nature is unique to Spain and challenging enough to have hosted national and international sport spelunking championships for the past 15 years. Making the drop requires legit rapelling equipment and permission from the Ayuntamiento in Oliete *(Plaza San Martin s/n, ☎ 97 881 80 01)*. The chasm is a haven for a variety of birds; you may pass bats on the way down or step on frogs and guano at the bottom. Before heading out, contact the **Federación Aragonesa de Espeleología** to get the scoop on conditions and current restrictions *(C/ Padre Marcellán 15, Zaragoza, ☎ 97 673 04 34)*.

The village of Oliete is situated in the Sierra de los Arcos in the Iberian Mountains 120 km (75 miles) northeast of Teruel. To reach the village, drive north from Teruel on the N-420. Pass Utrillas and make a right, heading east on the N-211. Roughly 15 km after Montalbán make a left, heading north in the direction of Alloza and Andora. When the road T-bones, make another left. The nearest accommodations are in Andorra, a 20-minute drive east of Oliete. The ☆☆**Hotel Andorra** *(Avda Albalete 13, ☎ 97 884 38 11, fax 97 884 22 21)* charges 39€ for a double room.

Adventures on Snow

Two snow skiing resorts are located in southeastern Teruel. They are **Javalambre** in the Sierra de Javalambre and **Valdelinares** in the Sierra de Gúdar. With the exceptional Pyrenees slopes so close, it is a wonder these small resorts see any traffic at all. Still, if you're headed south but maybe not quite far enough south to hit up the slopes of the Sierra Nevada outside Granada, either of these resorts could make for a fun afternoon. Serious downhillers, though, may be disappointed as neither offers challenging runs.

Javalambre has two green, four blue and one red run serviced by two chairlifts and three poma-lifts. A one-day pass is 20.50€, or 17.50€ for a half-day. *(Pico Javalambre, ☎ 97 876 81 81, fax 97 876 81 82, www.javalambre.com.)* To reach the resort from Teruel, take the N-234 southeast to La Puebla de Valverde and turn off, heading southwest. At Camarena de La Sierra, make a left at the sign.

Valdelinares, the newest resort in Aragón, has two green, three blue and three red runs serviced by three chairlifts and five poma-lifts. A one-day pass is 20.50€, or 17.50€ for a half-day. *(Ctra Alcalá-Valdelinares, ☎ 90 240 81 81, fax 97 872 80 09, www.valdelinares.com.)* From Teruel, follow the signs northeast for Cedrillas, where you turn off, heading east to Alcalá de la Selva. Drive south for one km (.6 mile) before turning left for the resort.

Where to Stay

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

The **Parador de Teruel** *(Ctra Sagunto-Burgos s/n, ☎ 97 860 18 10, fax 97 860 86 12, www.parador.es, d 85€)* is disappointing compared with most of the government-run *paradors* in Spain. Instead of a historical castle or monastery, it's a modern abode two km (1.2 miles) outside the city. Still, its rooms are affordable by *parador* standards, which include exceptional service and dependable regional cuisine in its restaurants. ☆☆☆ **Hotel Reina** *Cristina (Paseo del Ovalo 1, ☎ 97 860 68 60, fax 97 860 53 63, www.gargallo/hotels.com, d 100€)* is a classy place in the middle of the Casco Antiguo. The rooms are modernized and colored in pastels. For the money and the location, choose it over the Parador if possible. **Fonda del Tozal** *(C/ Rincón 5, ☎ 97 860 10 22, d 35€)* doesn't seem to have changed since the place was built in the 16th century. The tavern has white-washed walls, timber ceilings and refurbished antiques that date to the earliest days when it functioned as a *meson*, or traditional Spanish tavern. While the rooms have been adequately maintained and a pleasant restaurant and bar has been added (on its shelves are articles that have been left behind by travelers through the centuries), they are as austere as one would have found them 300 years ago. **Hostal Aragón** *(C/ Santa María 4, ☎ 97 860 13 87, d 25-30€)* is next to the lively Plaza del Torico. Though the rooms are sparse and outdated, they are kept clean and get plenty of sunshine. The family that lives in and runs the hostel is nice, but they like it quiet around their place at night. If you can't do without a television even for one day, they'll let you borrow one – for a few more euros, of course. If you prefer a private bath, try **Hostal Ovidio** *(Camino de la Estación 6, ☎ 97 860 28 66, d 25-35€)*, west of the Casco Antiguo next to the train station. The rooms on the bottom floor command a premium as they have recently been remodeled to include small private baths and modern-styled furniture.

What to Eat & Where

Teruel conforms to traditional Aragón cuisine – what one food critic called the simplest in Spain – but sets itself apart with its cured hams. Jamón de Teruel is second in quality only to the ham of Huelva and most say it is superior to that of Las Alpujarras. It is rich and oily, served thinly sliced as all cured ham is, and should melt in the mouth. Locals eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but it doesn't make for a very hearty or well-rounded meal and if you eat too much of it you'll never want to see or smell the stuff again. A good *tapas* bar to sample a variety of *jamón* creations is **Bar Aristos** *(Plaza del Torico 25)*. A *ración* of *jamón de Teruel* costs around 10€.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

You'll find plenty of other *tapas* bars in and around this main plaza. Locals stick to **La Menta** *($$$$, C/ Bartolomé Esteban 10, ☎ 97 860 75 32)* when questioned on the finer restaurants in Teruel. In contrast to the working-class feel of the city, La Menta is upper-scale in price and décor. The menu isn't wholly regional, but neither is it overtly creative; main dishes include sea bass in *salsa verde*, grilled beef chops and *pollo chilindrón* (chicken lightly fried in olive oil and served with a sauce of tomato, onion, red pepper and ham fried with garlic cloves). **Café Pub La Torre** *($$, C/ Salvador 20, ☎ 97 860 52 63)* takes its name from the city's emblematic Mudéjar towers and its reputation from its borage – a vegetable of the Ebro Valley cooked with potatoes and served with vinaigrette – and its Rioja peppers stuffed with salmon. It's a good place to have a *café con leche* as well. **Los Aljíbes** *(C/ Yagüe de Salas 3)*, meaning "the Cisterns," offers an assortment of traditional Teruel cuisine and a good regional selection of wines in a Mudéjar-like setting. The *menu del día* costs around 10€ and may include the traditional vegetable dish of borage, pan-seared trout or rich *chilindrón* chicken.

■ Excursions from Teruel

Lagoon of Gallocanta

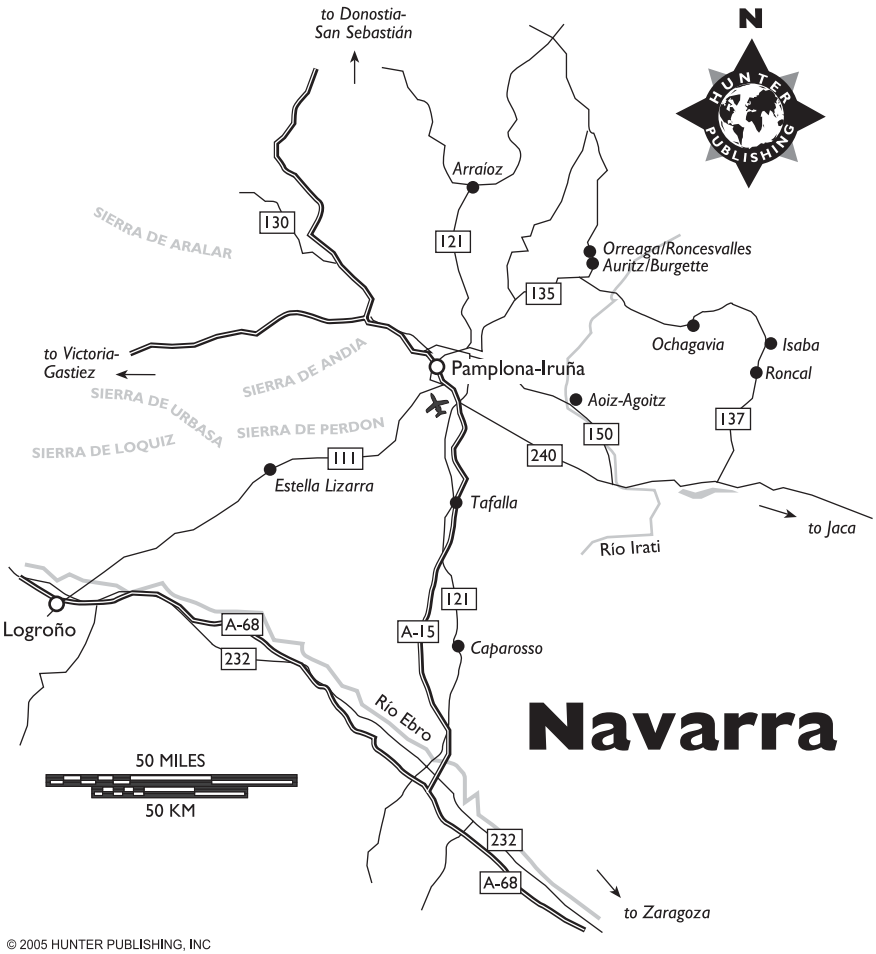
Loop the binoculars around the neck for a visit to Spain's largest inland lake (1,400 hectares/3,500 acres). During the winter months as many as 80 bird species make a stopover here to feed on eels during their annual northern retreat. For most, the star of the show is the European crane, which masses here in numbers greater than anywhere else on the European continent, up to 10,000 per day. As the largest steppe lagoon in Europe, it stands to reason the place would have such a calling card. The area around the lagoon isn't all that remarkable, mostly devoid of trees and terribly dry; reeds surround the banks and those of a number of smaller adjoining ponds. The months from November to February are the best times to visit the lake and birdwatch; the rest of the year the big lake seems deserted. The nearest town to Gallocanta is **Calamocha**, which maintains the **Centro de Interpretación de la Laguna de Gallocanta** *(☎ 97 873 40 29)*. From Teruel take the N-234 north to Calamocha and then turn west on the A-1507. Autobuses Tezaza *(☎ 97 627 61 79)* runs **buses** from Teruel to Calamocha.

Molinos

In El Maestrazgo, a dry region northeast of Teruel characterized by jagged, rocky outcroppings and a bevy of narrow ravines, Molinos is a captivating little village rarely experienced by outsiders. Its crude, utilitarian homes of local stone cling to the walls of a depression between three barren promontories. A wonderful medieval bridge in the center of the village fords the Barranco de San Nicolás, a deep ravine with a waterfall that can be heard throughout the town. For its size (the place isn't even on most maps), Molinos is surprisingly monumental – albeit on a miniature scale. Overlooking the arcaded Plaza Mayor is a 15th-century Gothic cathedral; on the side of the cliff, a 12th-century castle is perched, along with ruins of the old defensive wall and a few towers; there is an 18th-century hermitage, a 14th-century palace, ancient baths and even a botanical garden which the locals have somehow managed to create with relatively no topsoil.

A short hike from the village is **Las Grutas de Cristal**, a grotto with stalactites and stalagmites as fine and delicate as crystal, hence the name. The grotto is open year-round to visitors, though serious spelunkers may find that following the guide is a little tedious *(Parque Cultural de Molinos La Culebra, ☎ 97 884 90 85)*.

The one hostel in the village is on the busiest road in town, the only road really. **Hostal de la Villa** *(C/ Mayor 16, ☎ 97 884 92 34)*. To get here from Teruel take the N-420 north and at Utrillas head east on the N-211. You'll see the signs for the turnoff in Alcorisa.



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Navarra

South of France, east of the País Vasco and at the historical center of Castilian Spain sits Navarra, among the smallest of the country's autonomous communities but as dynamic in people, politics and heritage as they come. Basque people settled the region long before a succession of Roman, Gothic, Moorish and Frankish invaders gave way to the Spanish Catholics. As a result, a strong sense of Basque culture and the nationalism that comes with it are still apparent in the north and western parts of Navarra and in the capital of Pamplona. In these areas, names come in both Castillian and Euskara (the

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Basque language) and loyalties may lie not with Madrid but with the País Vasco. During the Civil War the Navarrese government sided with Franco's nationalists, a move that enraged its Basque contingent. Nonetheless, it was an astute decision that would ultimately spare many lives and win back favor under the Franco dictatorship that it had lost because of its support for Carlism in the 19th century.

Pamplona, called Iruña in the Basque language, is the famous setting for the annual **Running of the Bulls**, known locally as the Fiestas de Sanfermines. It has also been a major stop on the Christian pilgrimage since the 11th century, a path that runs southwest across the province from the lush mountain valleys of the north to the central plains and eventually the sunny, fertile valleys of the Río Ebro in the south. The path, or **Camino de Santiago**, enters Spain from France through a pass in the Pyrenees Mountains in northern Navarra, itself a famous site as the Frankish forces under Charlegmagne were ambushed and defeated by Basque forces there in the eighth century. A century later Pamplona became the seat of the newly established Kingdom of Navarra, one of the earliest Spanish Catholic kingdoms and the driving force behind the push to reconquer the peninsula from the Moors. By the 11th century Navarra had joined forces with the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragón, uniting all of northern Spain in the cause that would reunite the entire peninsula.

Pamplona (Iruña)

> *"We crossed a wide plain and there was a big river off on the right shining in the sun from between the line of trees, and away off you could see the plateau of Pamplona rising out of the plain, and the walls of the city and the great brown cathedral, and the broken skyline of the other churches. In back of the plateau were the mountains, and every way you looked there were other mountains, and ahead the road stretched out white across the plain going toward Pamplona."* Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta*

After an illuminating conversation that had touched on Real Madrid's new prospects with Beckham on the pitch, illegal immigration, the unseasonably warm June weather and the general contempt for bullfighting in Cataluña (later that year, the sport would be banned there), the man folded his newspaper and in all seriousness concluded that, to understand Spain, "you must to come to Los Sanfermines in Pamplona." At the time – sitting in a bar in Barcelona where the locals generally speak, eat, dress and think in an entirely different manner from the people of Navarra – his opinion had come across as a little too simple. That such an immensely varied country could be understood in a few days of celebrating in Pamplona was surely preposterous. In retrospect, though, the man may have had a point. He'd recognized my attempts to spirit away a few new insights on the Spanish culture through our conversation and told me what he thought I wanted to hear. Send all curious visitors to Pamplona for that one week in July and let them experience for themselves the intoxicating mix of religion, party, good food and sport that is the cornerstone of Spain, no matter what region you find yourself in.

Despite the international attention that has been heaped on Pamplona since Ernest Hemingway immortalized its festival in his book *The Sun Also Rises*,

the city doesn't simply close its shutters and sleep for the other 51 weeks of the year. There is the Casco Antiguo to explore, a netherworld of timeworn brick streets and closely confined – in some cases decaying – buildings highlighted by the Gothic Cathedral. It is a lively area day and night. A green belt ideal for strolling, jogging or just lazing away the day practically surrounds this old quarter. In touring the city, you may notice the numerous Basque flags and signs written in Euskara. The capital of Navarra has strong ties with its Basque neighbor and in some corners even shares its seething desire for independence. Early Basques settled the area and called it Iruña, well before the Romans officially founded the city in 75 BC and named it Pompaelo after their general Pompey the Great. Since that time the city has seen Goths and Arabs come and go, but by the eighth century was firmly in the control of the Catholics and poised to serve as the seat of the Kingdom of Navarra during the early phase of the Christian Reconquest.

Euskara

The origin of the Basque language is still a puzzle. It is not an Indoeuropean language, and has no relationship to languages in neighboring countries. Some linguists think it could be related to languages from the Caucasus. One of the most likely hypotheses argues that the Basque language developed here in the land of the primitive Basques. That theory is supported by the discovery of Basque-type skulls in Neolithic sites here. To support this hypothesis that Euskara is one of the oldest languages in Europe, linguists point out similarities between the root of words such as axe ("*aizkora*" or "*haizkora*") and rock ("*aitz*" or "*haitz*").

Hemingway published his book in 1926, years before the Civil War saw Pamplona aligned with Franco's nationalists. Hemingway, who enjoyed a reciprocal appreciation for Pamplona through its people, was nonetheless an outspoken supporter of the Republicans. The writer's legacy was ensured by the travails of the lead character of his Spanish Civil War novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. He was an American fighting for the Republicans in the mountains north of Madrid. And yet today's locals tend to laud Hemingway where they generally loathe Franco. The writer's statue stands proudly outside of the Plaza de Toros, frozen in the act of doing what Hemingway did best during Sanfermines – watching rather than running.

■ Useful Information

Tourism

The main **Oficina de Turismo** is in the Plaza San Francisco in the Casco Antiguo *(C/ Eslava 1, ☎ 94 820 65 40)*. During Sanfermines the office is open from sunup until sundown and stocked with plenty of information on the festivities. **Novotur** *(Avda Bayona 9, ☎ 94 826 76 15, novotur@meganet.es)* leads guided tours of the city in Spanish, German, French and English.

■ Adventure Guides

Nattura Naturaleza y Aventura *(C/ Marcelo Celayeta 75, ☎ 94 813 10 44, fax 94 813 49 41, www.nattura.com, info@nattura.com)* organizes climbing,

biking, canyoning, rafting and hiking trips to Navarra's Pyrenees Mountains and environs. Mountain bikes can be rented at **Servicios Turísticos Erreka** *(C/ Curia 18, ☎ 94 822 15 06, www.erreka.net)* and if you're headed northwest to San Sebastián, stop by **Ocio Navarra** *(C/ Virgen de Codes 5, ☎ 94 817 22 38, www.buceosplash.com)* to arrange a scuba diving trip.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación de Tren is across the Río Arga, northwest of the Casco Antiguo on Avenida de San Jorge *(☎ 94 813 02 02)*. From the *Ayuntamiento*, or town hall, in Plaza Consistorial, head west on Calle Mayor, pass the Plaza Recoletas and make a right on Calle Taconera, which becomes Avda de Guipúzcoa. After crossing the river on Puente Cuatrovientos, make a left. Daily destinations include **Logroño** (1½ hours), **Bilbao** (2½ hours), **San Sebastián** (1½ hours), **Zaragoza** (1½ hours), **Madrid** (six hours) and **Barcelona** (seven hours).

By Bus: The Estación de Autobus is at the corner of Avenida de Yangüas y Miranda and Avenida del Ejército *(☎ 94 822 38 54)*. From the Plaza del Castillo in the Casco Antiguo walk down Avda de San Ignacio and at the Plaza Príncipe de Viana make a right. Daily destinations include San Sebastián (one hour), Bilbao (two hours), Logroño (one hour), Zaragoza (two hours), Madrid (five hours) and Barcelona (six hours).

■ Sightseeing

After hearing so much about Pamplona, some people are dismayed when they actually get to the city and realize there aren't all that many things to see. Others may be relieved to known that within an hour or two the hard work we tourists take on for ourselves can be completed, leaving the rest of the day to get acquainted with the interesting medieval streets of Pamplona's Casco Antiguo.

Casco Antiguo

The old quarter sits astride the Río Arga in the northwestern quadrant of town. While not as ornate and spotless as the wide streets of old Salamanca, or as colorful as Córdoba or Segovia, Pamplona's compact mess of narrow, bricked streets has its own understated appeal. Small, traditional eateries are sandwiched between dive bars, Belle Époque cafés and fancy boutique shops. In the Plaza del Castillo, the focal point of the Casco Antiguo, you may be witness to an impromptu game of Coke can soccer or the dismal but usually entertaining singing of a busker.

Surrounded by trees, the Plaza de Toros is two blocks southeast of the plaza on the only side of the Casco Antiguo that isn't surrounded by a green belt. To the west are the parks of Larraina, La Taconera and the manicured grounds of the Ciudadela's Vuelta del Castillo. North, between the river and the old quarter, the Parque de Santo Domingo marks the spot where the fighting bulls begin their charge south to the Plaza de Toros each year during Sanfermines.

In the east, the Parque de Tejería greets pilgrims as they cross the Puente de La Magdalena and chart their own course west through the Casco Antiguo in what is the initial phase of a very long walk to Santiago de Compostela.

Ayuntamiento

Freestanding in the Plaza Consistorial, Pamplona's elegant Baroque town hall is an emblem of the city's governance and, for at least one day each year, its anarchic side. On the first day of Sanfermines revelers crowd into the plaza in front of the town hall and with window-shattering buzz wait for its clock to strike 12 noon. When it does, the mayor emerges onto the balcony and fires a rocket into the air, officially marking the beginning of what has been called Europe's wildest party.

Catedral & Iglesias

The city's Catedral is backed by a hill of trees on the eastern limits of the Casco Antiguo. Its sand-colored Neoclassical façade conceals a mostly Gothic temple begun in the 14th century and completed 200 years later. Before the main altarpiece, the lifelike figures carved into two alabaster tombs represent the remains of King Carlos III of Navarra and his wife Doña Navarra, both eternally asleep in prayer. The Catedral's *claustro* (cloister) is of particular note, an ornate square of Franco-Gothic style rated one of the finest of its kind in Europe. From it, a gate leads to the refectory and **Museo Diocesano**, housing a collection of religious articles and paintings spanning the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque periods. *(Calle Dormitalería, ☎ 94 821 08 27, open Mon.-Fri. 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. 10:30 am-1:30 pm, entry 3.61€.)*

The city's other historical churches are also on the perimeter of the Casco Antiguo. In the west, the Plaza Recoletas separates the Convento de Recoletas from the **Iglesia de San Lorenzo** *(C/ Mayor 74, ☎ 94 822 53 71, open 8 am-12:30 pm and 6:30-8 pm)*. It contains the Baroque *capilla* (chapel) of the city's patron saint and impetus for its famous festival, Sanfermines.

On the southern edge of the Casco Antiguo off the Paseo Sarasate is the 13th-century **Iglesia de San Nicolás** *(C/ San Miguel 15, ☎ 94 822 12 81)*, the only one of Pamplona's religious sites to maintain its truly Romanesque design. This architectural movement, the name for which indicates its fundamentally Roman stylistic and structural cues, came to influence many of northern Spain's monuments built during the centuries leading up to the Middle Ages. Throughout these northern regions, and particularly in the city of Pamplona, later Gothic, Baroque and Neoclassical renovations have largely obscured the original style.

Museo de Navarra

The former hospital once had an attractive plateresque façade. Today it houses the city's museum, displaying regional relics from prehistoric times to more recent history. Along with a neat set of Roman mosaics, the painting of the Marquis de San Adrián by Francisco de Goya and a Hispano-Arabic ivory casket are its greatest treasures *(Cuesta de Santo Domingo, ☎ 94 842 64 92, open Tues.-Sat. 9:30 am-2 pm and 5-7 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; entry 1.80€).*

La Ciudadela

Designed to secure the city from foreign invaders, the citadel was begun in 1571 under the reign of King Felipe II over the site of an earlier castle. The pentagonal-shaped defensive fortification was modeled on a similar one in Antwerp, though two of its original five star-shaped bulwarks have since disappeared. The **Parque Vuelta del Castillo** surrounds the citadel. To access the park and fortress, which are shrouded by trees and further concealed by a massive wall, head to the huge gate on Calle Chinchilla. *(Avda Ejército s/n, ☎ 94 822 82 37, open Mon.-Sat. 7:30 am-9:30 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-9:30 pm.)*

■ Festivals

Sanfermines

"The fiesta was really started. It kept up day and night for seven days. The dancing kept up, the drinking kept up, the noise went on. The things that happened could only have happened during a fiesta. Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences during the fiesta. All during the fiesta you had the feeling, even when it was quiet, that you had to shout any remark to make it heard. It was the same feeling about any action. It was a fiesta and it went on for seven days." Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta*

The Fiestas of Sanfermines celebrate the city's patron saint, but the stars of this outrageous seven-day party are undeniably the bulls. For three short minutes each morning they race through the streets of the Casco Antiguo on the heels of brave, or at least inebriated runners (*mozos*) wearing their traditional white outfit with red sashes (*fajas*) tied around their waists and bandanas (*pañuelas*) around their neck. During each *encierro*, or running of the bulls, both man and beast are literally running for their lives, contending with streets slippery from alcohol and harrowing turns that regularly sweep their legs out from under them, depositing both in a heap. Serious runners train year-round and count 10 or more years' worth of *encierros* to their credit, while others require just a few cups of liquid bravery to run and, in many cases, end up counting the number of stitches it took to repair their gore holes. You'll recognize the true *Sanferministas*, though maybe not the smartest. They are the ones who, after a day and night of non-stop partying, manage to pass out in the Plaza Consistorial for a few hours before the police come in. With the spray of high-powered water hoses, the authorities let these snoozers know it is time to make way for the next running of the bulls.

The festival begins on the day of the 6th as locals crowd into the Plaza Consistorial to await the noon firing of the rocket (*chupinazo*) from the town hall, signaling the start of the festivities. Chants of "Sanfermines" erupt from the expectant, bandana-waving crowd and, once the smoke has cleared and the mass is drenched in confetti and anything else locals could get their hands on, the *peñas*, groups of official revelers associated with the bullring, continue to incite the crowd with raucous song. Each morning thereafter starts off with the firing of the canon at 8 am, signaling that the bulls (up to nine at

a time) have been released from the Carralillos de Santo Domingo (little corral). The bulls charge across the plaza and through the street to Plaza Consistorial, before turning left on Calle Mercaderes. From this street they turn the corner (a very dangerous corner) onto the famous Calle Estafeta, the last leg to the Plaza de Toros, where a crowd eagerly awaits their arrival. Afterwards, smaller cows are released for the crowd to piddle with. From the wee-hours of the morning on, municipal bands play in the streets and by the afternoon the enormous figures of the *gigantes* (giants) and *zaldikos* (horseback figures) have made their daily appearance, much to the delight of the children. The clownish *kilikis* (big-headed figures) add a lighthearted touch to the festivities as they bray through the crowds bearing harmless clubs. The *kilikis* will also assist in escorting the 15th-century wooden shrine of San Fermín from its resting place in the Iglesia de San Lorenzo through the streets on July 7th.

> *"The bullfight is a Spanish institution; it has not existed because of the foreigners and tourists, but always in spite of them and any step to modify it to secure their approval, which it will never have, is a step towards its complete suppression."* Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*

Tips for the Running of the Bulls

- The tourism office supplies a detailed map of the course the bulls run each morning. Consider sitting out the first few in order to get a bead on just what the running of the bulls entails. Two good vantage points are the Plaza de Santo Domingo and the Plaza de Toros.
- When and if you're ready to join the other *loco mozos*, enter the course in the Plaza de Santo Domingo next to the *carralillo* (holding pens) some time before 7:30 am. Others prefer to sit out the first stretch of the run and bide their time in the Plaza Consistorial until they hear the steady drumming of hooves approaching.
- The first rocket fired signals that the corrals have been opened. The second means that the bulls are off and running.
- Three minutes may not sound like much, but consider running down winding, narrow and slippery streets for that long with nine angry bulls breathing down your neck.
- Watch out for the sharp corner of Calle de los Mercaderes and Calle de la Estafeta. It is a killer.
- Ducking into doorjambs is not as good an idea as you might think.
- Most runners are not injured in the actual running, but from bulls that have become separated from the herd. Without the herd to keep them in line, these disoriented and understandably angry strays will attack anything that moves.
- If you fall, use common sense. If the bulls are almost upon you, tuck up in a tight ball and guard your head as best you can. If there is still time to get out of the way, by all means get up and run.

- Don't look back!
- The third boom of the rocket means that all the bulls have made it into the Plaza de Toros. The fourth and final boom indicates that they've successfully been herded into stalls.
- Tickets for the following day's bullfights become available at the ticket booths of the Plaza de Toros following that day's fights. Seats in the *sol* (sun) are cheaper and more readily available than in the *sombra* (shade), plus you'll get a suntan. From the 7th to the 14th, the fights begin each day at 6:30 pm. Plenty of scalpers are on hand if the ticket booths sell out. Though it's illegal, scalping is a common practice and the cops usually turn a blind eye. Tickets prices can range from 15€ to over 100€.

■ Nightlife

There is no reason to leave the Casco Antiguo as dusk comes. At all hours of the day and most of the night the **Plaza del Castillo** is a center of activity. Ringing the plaza are inviting *cervecerías* and a number of popular cafés, headed by the wonderful but heavily touristed **Café Iruña** *(Plaza del Castillo 44)*. It is one of the classier establishments in town, a lavish statement of Belle Époque styling to which locals have long come for coffee, liqueur and sweet little *magdalenas* to sop up what's at the bottom of the cup.

To experience Pamplona's nightlife, you could start off by stepping downstairs into **Sub Suelo**, a popular (and usually crowded) club in a cave-like setting with countless archways propping up the café above. From the Plaza, the main bar districts are **Calle San Nicolás** and **San Gregorio** or, if you're younger or just want to catch up on the latest fashion trends, make for **Calle San Agustin**, **Calderia** and **Jarauta**.

> **TIP:** The monthly publication ***Disfrutar Pamplona*** keeps up with the local cultural and entertainment happenings in Pamplona. It can be picked up at tourism offices, most hotels and bars.

■ Where to Stay

Hotels, hostels, *fondas* and *pensiones* get booked up well in advance of Sanfermines. Due to the demand, most of the hotel owners double, triple even quadruple their prices. Some don't even allow reservations (don't have to), while the nicer establishments will require a credit card deposit. Younger travelers don't seem to mind sleeping in the parks or even in the streets during the festival. Be forewarned, thieves are at the top of their game during this week and if you fall

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

asleep with your head on your backpack it doesn't necessarily mean it will be there when you wake up.

Iruña Palace Tres Reyes *(Jardines de la Taconera, s/n, ☎ 94 822 66 00, fax 94 822 29 30, www.hotel3reye.com, hotel3reyes@abc.ibernet.com, d 168-420€)* is a tall, modern hotel with glassed-in balconies overlooking the Parque Taconera and the Casco Antiguo a block away. The spacious, contemporary-styled rooms were completely renovated along with the rest of the hotel in 2002. Each has cable television, a mini-bar and full bath, while the hotel itself offers a sauna, squash court, gym, swimming pool, restaurant and bar.

Another modern hotel on the edge of the Casco Antiguo is **Mainnave** *(C/ Nueva 20, ☎ 94 822 26 00, fax 94 822 01 66, informacion@hotelmaisonnave.es, d 67-90€)*. Each of this large hotel's rooms has private bath and satisfactory, if a little run-of-the-mill, décor. While its location is prime, offering views of the Cathedral and winding streets of the Casco Antiguo, the young ruffians about each night in this *marcha* area can disturb your sleep.

If you'd like to stay in the heart of the Casco Antiguo and don't mind sparse, but comfortable hotel accommodations, try ☆ **Arriazu** *(C/ Comedia 14, ☎ 94 821 02 02, fax 94 821 02 07, hostalarriazu@terra.es, d 60-240€)*. Due to its location next to the Plaza del Castillo, its 11 double rooms fill up fast, not only during Sanfermines but throughout the summer. Rooms are classically decorated and furnished with television, telephone, mini-bar, and full baths – just don't expect a chocolate mint on your pillow in the evenings.

Budget

Pension Principe de Viana *(Avda Zaragoza 4, ☎ 94 824 91 47, fax 94 824 91 46)* is two blocks south of the bus station and a few more from the Casco Antiguo. All of its rooms have private bath, television, heating and hot water. Prices range from 42-84€. **Pension Leire** *(C/ Begamín 5, ☎ 94 821 16 47, fax 65 947 73 82, hostal.leyre@teleline.es)* is a 10-minute walk from the Casco Viejo. Each of its rooms is cheaply, but tastefully decorated and outfitted with shower, television, mini-bar (a little fridge) and hair driers. Have a look at more than one room if possible, as some are larger with couches and balconies. In the heart of the old quarter near the lively Plaza del Castillo, **Pension Otano** *(C/ San Nicolás 5, ☎ 94 822 70 36, fax 94 821 20 12)* offers simply furnished rooms that could use a little sprucing up. Still, the location is prime and if you manage to book a room here during Sanfermines you probably won't use it for more than showering anyway. Most of the rooms have private bath and all have air conditioning, heating and television. A double costs 45-70€.

Calle San Gregorio, the extension of San Nicolas, has **Pension Casa García** *(C/ San Gregorio 12, ☎ 94 822 38 93)* with very basic rooms (no frills whatsoever) for 21-30€ per night. The same goes for **Pension Lambertini** *(C/ Mercaderes 17, ☎ 94 821 03 03)* which, because of its location overlooking the course for the running of the bulls, can jack its rates up to 126€ per night. The rest of the year you can nab one for 30€. Bathrooms are shared, though the hosts are nice enough to provide clean towels.

Camping

Ezcaba *(C.N.-121 pasando Oricain, ☎ 94 833 03 15, fax 94 833 13 16)* is a five-minute drive north of Pamplona. Take the N-121A and after two km (1.2 miles) turn west in the direction of Ezcaba. It's a

large campsite capable of accommodating over 700 people, but during Sanfermines it could use four times the space. Facilities include a grocery store, café, swimming pool, bathrooms, showers, gas and electric. An adult, a car and a tent are each charged 3.52€.

■ What to Eat & Where

Navaresse cuisine is said to be a compendium of all Spanish cuisine, a mix of fresh fruits and vegetables coupled with products from land and sea. It is fundamentally country fare perfect for meat and potato lovers, with an emphasis on beef, roast lamb and pork, but not without a representative serving of wild game including duck, rabbit and fresh trout. Likewise, seafood makes its way to Navaresse dinner tables from the Bay of Biscay, often accompanied by sautéed artichokes or stuffed into the region's common *piquillo* pepper.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Next to the Plaza de Toros, **Restaurante Rodero** *($$$$, Arrieta 3, ☎ 94 822 80 35)* is a local institution with a reputation for creating unique dishes with an eye to traditional Navarrese cuisine. As it's one of the finer restaurants in town, you'll want to look sharp (not that you don't always) and, on weekend nights, make reservations. Some house specialties included a crown of fried artichoke hearts in *piquillo* pepper oil, candied roast suckling pig with fig and melon compote, and turbot with a *fideuá* of baby squid (a baked pasta dish similar to rice-based *paella*).

On Calle San Nicolás, the culinary hub in the Casco Antiguo, **Baserri** *($$, C/ San Nicolás 32, ☎ 94 822 20 21)* is known to have the best *pinchos*, or *tapas*, in Pamplona. Its walls are brandished with the proof of its having won probably every award the city has offered for the past 20 years. Feast your eyes on the long rows of *tapas* and try at least one of the *piquillo* peppers stuffed with hake or the sirloin and Roquefort cheese. Just down from Baserri is **San Fermín** *($$-$$$, C/ San Nicolás 44, ☎ 94 822 21 91)*, well known and loved among locals and summertime tourists alike. The restaurant serves an exceptional vegetable stew called *menestra* and an equally enticing rice dish with clams and lamb.

For traditional fare at affordable prices in a unique setting, try **La Servicial Vinícula** *($$, C/ Navarro Villoslada 11, ☎ 94 823 43 83).* What began as a wine seller has expanded due to its popularity and now offers an affordable *menu del día* with options including *bacalao ajoarriero* (cod in a garlic and pepper sauce) and *cordero al chilindrón* (roast lamb in tomato and pepper). **Bastería del Temple** *(C/ Mercaderes del Curia 3)* is an old-school *meson*, or traditional Spanish tavern, occupying a second floor overlooking one of the running streets in the Casco Viejo. The meson offers a 12€ *menu del día* with choices like sirloin, veal cutlets, hake and the traditional stuffed *piquillo* peppers.

■ Excursions from Pamplona

Estella-Lizarra

In its southwestern course across Navarra, the Camino de Santiago passes through an impressive ensemble of religious monuments. Estella-Lizarra, southwest of Pamplona, is the largest village along the way and the most exceptional in terms of architecture and setting. Estella was founded in the 11th century after King Sancho had rerouted the Camino through Navarra and La Rioja. Since then the village, which tops a rise where the Ríos Ega and Urederra meet, has acquired its noteworthy holdings.

Useful Information

Autobuses La Estellesa *(☎ 94 855 01 27)* run daily from Pamplona to Estella, which is southwest of the capital on the N-111. The **Oficina de Turismo** is on the left bank in the old quarter *(C/ San Nicolás 1, ☎ 94 855 22 50)*.

Sightseeing

At the center of the old quarter is the **Plaza de San Martín** and the **Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa**, a gloomy, lichen-covered church with an attractive Romanesque cloister and sanctuary. Sharing the plaza is the 12th-century Romanesque **Palacio de Los Reyes**, now home to the **Museo de Gustavo de Maeztu**; the museum is dedicated to the 20th-century Art Nouveau painter who lived out his twilight years in Estella.

Crossing the Puente de la Cárcel over the river leads to the **Iglesia de San Miguel** on the far bank, which has a beautiful Romanesque doorway and keeps weird hours, making it difficult to see much. Nearby, the **Plaza de los Fueros** is the center of activity in the newer part of town.

Where to Stay

Pilgrims usually stay at the **Alberque de Peregrinos** *(C/ La Rúa 50, ☎ 94 855 02 00, d 20€)*, the oldest accommodation in town, with sparse antique furnishings and an eclectic low-budget European clientele, many of them eager to converse after a day of solitary walking. A modern – although not all that appealing – alternative is **Hotel Yerri** *(C/ Yerri 35, ☎ 94 854 60 34)* on the outskirts of the old quarter near the Plaza de Toros. To stay in the center of the action, try **Hostal Cristina** *(C/ Baja Navarra 1, ☎ 94 855 04 50)*, which has clean rooms with television and balconies overlooking the sights. **Camping Lizarra** *(Ordoiz, s/n, ☎ 94 855 17 33, www.navarra.net/lizarra)* is a few miles northeast of town off the *carretera* to Pamplona. It's a large site, with more than adequate facilities and a pretty setting on the riverbank. Adults pay 3.19€ per night.

The Navarran Pyrenees

Navarra is the westernmost of Spain's provinces to share the mighty Pyrenees Mountains with France. While the entirety of its northern border exhibits such granite peaks and river valleys strewn with beech, chestnut and ash trees, the actual Pyrenees begin their earnest upheaval in the northeastern

quadrant of the province. This area, known as the Pirineos Orientales, is not as imposing in height or as impressive in its wilderness as the Pyrenees of Aragón or Cataluña. Still, there are numerous opportunities for outdoor sports, particularly cross-country skiing, hiking and fishing, and many of the mountain villages below cater to such excursions. These villages often bear two names separated by a dash; the first is the Castilian version of its name and the second the Euskara, or Basque version. The villages of Pamplona's less mountainous northwest, in particular, share a strong tradition and cultural bond with their Basque neighbors to the west and their French-Basque counterparts to the north.

Pamplona's northeastern region is usually broken down into four areas. The easternmost, marking part of Navarra's border with Aragón, corresponds with the Valle de Roncal. Moving in a westerly direction leads to the Valle de Salazar, followed by the villages strewn along the banks of the Río Irati, an old Hemingway favorite. The westernmost area of Navarra's Pirineos Orientales is defined by the villages that have developed as a result of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route passing through them.

■ Valle de Roncal

Isaba/Izaba

There is no reason to stay in Isaba if you deplore snow skiing, the slow life or the visual trappings of a picturesque mountain village. Isaba is banked at the confluence of the Ríos Belagua and Uztárroz in the far northwestern corner of Navarra; its archetypal stone Pyrenean homes are clustered around the fortress-church of **San Cipriano** – and that's about it for the sights; better to spend time wandering through the interesting streets, eating and planning the next excursion. The village's proximity to France gives it a particular flare and ensures that during the peak months of the winter and summer Izaba will fill up with cross-border stragglers.

How to Settle a Dispute

The Navarrese used to have a problem with the French because the latter allowed their sheep to graze on the more verdant, southern side of the border. To settle their ongoing dispute, it was arranged that the French would give the Navarrese villages a yearly gift of three cows. On July 13 at the Piedra de San Martín border stone, the mayors of the French Valley of Baretous meet with their counterparts of the Roncal Valley during the **Tributo de las Tres Vacas**. The affair is mostly symbolic these days. The mayors shake hands over the stone, renewing their vows of peace, after which the French side hands over three hearty cows, which will be returned once the crowd has filtered away.

Adventures on Snow

Isaba is a main base for cross-country skiers (the northern track is a short drive away) and downhillers overflowing from the French ski resort of Arette. **Ekia Actividades y Servicios S.L.L.** *(☎ 69 689 99 95, www.ekiapirineo.com, info@ekiapirineo.com)* offers advice, equipment and guide service for such winter sports and also

runs rafting, canoeing and kayaking on the Ríos Irate and Eska. **Larra** *(☎ 94 889 31 41)* is another guide company in town which more specifically caters to abseiling (canyoning).

Roncal

The valley's namesake has a cheesy reputation. The fabrication of Queso Roncal, a cheese made from the milk of the Pyrenee's Rasa sheep, is its primary enterprise. The pungent, oily cheese ranks up there with Manchego and Cabrales in terms of name recognition. Others know Roncal not for its cheese, but for the famous Spanish tenor Julián Gayarre who was born here. His remains are entombed in an ornate mausoleum in the village's cemetery and his former home has been converted into the **Museo-Casa de Julán Gayarre** *(☎ 94 386 23 41, open Jan.-Sept. Wed.-Sun. 4-8 pm)*.

Roncal, with its traditional Pyrenean homes of stone and barrel tile roofs, lies on the banks of the Río Eska, on which trout fishing is popular just south of the village. A Nature Interpretation Center and tourism office both offer further information on the valley, while the vendors manning the stalls along the streets offer enticing samples of that famous cheese.

Useful Information

Roncal is the easiest city to reach in the valley via public transportation. **La Tafallesa Buses** *(☎ 94 822 28 86)* run from Pamplona to the bus stop on Paseo de Julián next to the *Ayuntamiento*. With your own car, head east from Pamplona in the direction of Aoiz on the NA-150. At Lumbier, turn onto the NA-178 heading northeast to Navascués. In that village, turn east on the NA-124 and, when the road dead-ends at Burgui, pick up the NA-137 running north.

To learn more about the village, find out about *casas rurales*, hiking trails, fishing holes or cheese factory tours, stop by Roncal's **Centro de Interpretación de la Naturaleza** *(Paseo de Julián Gayarre, s/n, ☎ 94 847 52 56)*. Many of the local families in the village have converted their homes for use as *casas rurales*. These rustic homes generally correspond in décor and facilities with the locals' way of living. Some may be sparse, while others have all the accessories and hotel-like service. It is usually necessary to call ahead. The two nicest in town are **Casa Indiano** *(☎ 94 847 51 22, d 24€)* and **Casa María José** *(☎ 94 847 51 72, d 25€)*.

■ Valle de Salazar

Ochagavía

Some say it's the prettiest, if not most typical Pyrenean village in Navarra. The setting is fine enough, in the lush Salazar valley at the confluence of the Ríos Anduña and Zatoia. The homes and other buildings in town are in most cases built of whitewashed plaster with red brick roofs, in contrast to the slate and granite combination that becomes commonplace as you head farther east and ever higher into the Pyrenees. The buildings of Ochagavía are not, however, that old in comparison to some of the surrounding mountain villages. And that is the fault of the French, who burned the place to the ground in 1794 during the Guerra de la Convención. You can see the damage in what is left of the 16th-century fortress/church of **San Juan Evangelista**.

Outside of town, the beautiful 12th-century Romanesque **Hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Muskilda** managed to avoid the fire. As the main village in the valley, Ochagavía maintains a nature observation center with information on hikes and species you may spot in the Valle de Salazar.

Useful Information

It's a beautiful mountain drive from Pamplona to Ochagavía. Head northeast on the N-135 and, after passing Aurizberri/Espinal, continue east on the NA-140. **Autobuses Río Irati** run from Pamplona to the Ochagavía bus stop in front of the **Oficina de Turismo** *(Antiguas Escuelas, ☎ 94 889 06 41, www.ochagavia.com)*. If you plan to hike or bike in the valley and have an interest in flora and fauna, stop by the **Centro de Interpretación de la Naturaleza** *(C/ Urrutia, ☎ 94 889 06 41, www.valledesalazar.com)*.

Adventures on Snow

Ochagavía is frequently used as a base camp for cross-country skiers and ice hikers in the Navarra Pyrenees. One of the main trails cuts around Mount Ori near the town of Izalzu. This village is six km (3.6 miles) north of Ochagavía on the NA-140. For further information and for ski rentals or guides, contact **Ekia Actividades y Servicios S.L.L.** *(☎ 94 889 05 37)*, an adventure guide company with offices in Ochagavía and in Isaba/Izaba, the other main snow skiing center.

Adventures on Foot or Horseback

The village of **Usún** is the starting point of a trail through the Garganta de Arbaiun. The Río Salazar has carved this six-km (3.6-mile) gorge, which dips to some 400 m (1,280 feet) in places. The hiking path is carved into the vertical rock walls around the mid-height of the gorge, affording spectacular and occasionally nauseating views of the river far below. The trail terminates in an uphill jaunt to the Iso Mountain Pass with a *mirador* overlooking the valley and gorge. While the guides at **Hipica Arabyún** *(Valle de Romanzado, ☎ 94 888 02 71)* in Usún won't allow their horses on the main gorge trail, they will saddle them up for an hour, half-day, or all-day trot through the valley. The prices are 12€, 30€ and 48€, respectively.

Where to Stay

Hostal Auñamendi *(Plaza de Gúrpide 1, ☎ 94 889 01 89)* occupies a typical *casona* of Ochagavía in the heart of the village. A night in this carefully decorated and well furnished abode (rooms have television, private bath, telephone and heat) makes for a truly authentic Spanish experience. While the sun is shining, you'll be served breakfast on the outdoor terrace.

■ The Río Irati

> *"Way off we saw the steep bluffs, dark with trees and jutting with gray stone, that marked the course of the Irati River."* Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

The trout stream that Hemingway appreciated begins in the mountains of France and runs in a southerly direction west of the Valle de Salazar before connecting with the Río Salazar outside the village of Lumbier. The largest village along the river is **Oroz Betelu**. Unfortunately, size doesn't equate with character or points of interest. One positive is that the fishing can be excellent just north of the village on the Río Irati.

Adventures on Foot

For those interested in cultural **hikes**, the village of **Orbaitzeta**, north from Oroz Betelu on the river, makes a good start. Signposted trails lead out of the village to the prehistoric dolmens (ritualistic funeral pyres) of Azpegi; or, if you're up for a more strenuous hike, to the top of Mount Urkulu, which is crowned by an interesting Roman tower. Another popular hiking trail is in the village of **Lumbier**, on the banks of the river in the southern foothills of Navarra's Pyrenees. The village caps a rise shaded by the Leyre Mountain Range. While the Iglesia de Asunción and the palatial homes strung along Calle Mayor are worthwhile, the main feature of Lumbier is the deep river-carved ravines around the village. To the north, the **Foz de Arabyún** is a nature reserve for vultures. The Río Irati winds through the reserve and village, after which it merges with the Río Salazar to create the stunning **Garganta de Lumbier**, which can be explored afoot via two tunnels drilled long ago for the now defunct Irati timber train. To reach the gorge from the village, follow the old railway bed a short way south and you'll emerge amid sheer cliffs above the river with choughs, vultures and trees that have somehow sprouted from the vertical face and managed to hang on.

TREE HUGGERS

On the first weekend in May each year, locals celebrate their traditional lumber industry by binding logs with hazel tree switches and floating down the Irati river. Once the timber workers have completed the course, they celebrate with a picnic of *migas*, a traditional country dish of stale bread that has been fried in lard.

■ Sangüesa/Zangotza

The Río Irati has drained the last of its water into the Río Aragón before passing through the monumental town of Sangüesa. It is not, in fact, a Pyrenean mountain village, though you'll find a few companies in town that run rafting and other adventure trips in the mountains. The city is the most visited in eastern Navarra and has, since its founding by the Romans, benefited from its location on the Camino Aragonés, one of the many arms of the Camino de Santiago. A wealth of religious monuments testifies to the droves of devout travelers that have passed through this town east of Pamplona.

Useful Information

To reach Sangüesa by **car**, drive south from Pamplona on the N-240-A and after three km (1.8 miles) turn east on the N-240 at the village of Noáin. After passing through Nardués, turn south onto the NA-534. **Buses** run daily from Pamplona to Sangüesa's

stop on Calle Mayor *(☎ 94 887 02 09)*. The **Oficina de Turismo** is also on this main street *(C/ Mayor 2, ☎ 94 884 14 11, oit.sanguesa@cfnavarra.es)*.

Sightseeing

The most impressive work is the 12th-century **Iglesia de Santa María** *(open for guided tours only, Mon.-Sat. 12:30 -6:30 pm),* which exhibits a gorgeous carved Romanesque doorway, seen at right, with a mix of holy and wholly out-of-place figures, like the frog. The **Iglesia de Santiago**, a few blocks off the Calle Mayor, was built during the transition period from Romanesque to Gothic and, as you would expect, bears numerous images of St. James, offering pilgrims just one of many sneak peaks along the way to the (alleged) real deal in Santiago de Compostela. The **Iglesia de San Salvador** and **San Francisco de Asís** are Gothic in design, while on the outskirts of town you'll find the Romanesque **Iglesia de San Adrián de Vadoluengo**.

The main drag (Calle Mayor) runs past the 15th-century Palacio de los Duques de Granada and the Palacio de los Condes de Guenduláin and then to **Palacio Vallesantoro**, undeniably the weirdest building in town. Its edifice is Baroque, but the overhanging eves could have been manufactured for some kind of oriental festival, which the city obviously has none of. The leering human and animalistic figures and, above all, the unexpected angles of the eves, make for a bizarre home to the town's cultural center.

Where to Stay & Eat

The **Hotel Xabier** *(Plaza de Javier s/n, ☎ 94 888 40 06, fax 94 888 40 78, www.hotelxabier.com)* is near the **Castillo de Javier** *(open 9 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm)*, outside of Sangüesa. The Castillo is renowned as the birthplace of Saint Francis Xavier who, along with Saint Ignatius, founded the Jesuit order. The hotel rooms are classically styled, a little medieval, but not really all that old by Spanish standards. The rooms are OK, but the restaurant's food is not (just say no to *callos*). The proprietors of **Pensión Las Navas** *(C/ Alfonso el Batallador 7, ☎ 94 887 00 77, d 30)* are friendly and accommodating. The rooms, while basic, have private bathrooms and showers.

Camping Cantolagua *(C/ Belate 22, ☎ 94 843 03 52, fax 94 887 13 13, camping.sanguesa@alva.net)* is a pretty little site on the riverbank in town. You'll find more than enough facilities on hand; in addition to the basics of hook-ups, running water, a café and small market, there is a library, tennis court and swimming pool. **Adventure Guide Mar del Pirineo** operates out of the campsite *(www.mardelpirineo.com, camping.sanguesa@mardelpirineo.com)*. Besides renting mountain bikes and canoes, they offer guided horseback rides, canyoning, hiking, and waterskiing trips. Two hours in a canoe on the Río Aragon costs 15€.

The unassuming **La Bodega** on Calle Mayor *(# 57, ☎ 94 887 04 03)* serves tasty seafood-stuffed peppers, combo plates and pizzas with no tomato sauce, as usual.

■ The Pilgrim's Way

Roncesvalles/Orreaga

There are some priests, a smattering of historical religious buildings and not much else but the pilgrims who often begin the Camino de Santiago in this village. To the north, the Camino Francés enters Spain near the serene village of Luzaide/Valcarlos before passing over the Puente de Ibañeta, near the site of the **Battle of Roncesvalles** in 778, to reach Orreaga. A monument pays tribute to Roland at the pass, the Brittany governor who was ambushed along with his rearguard by locals as Charlemagne led his troops back to France. The Sanctuary of Orreaga, whose complex fairly sums up the town, was founded in 1332 after a shepherd discovered the statue of the Virgin de Orreaga protruding from the ground nearby. Like many of Spain's Virgin relics, it had been buried so that it would not be discovered and destroyed by the Moors. Lord knows how many of these icons remain buried somewhere in the Spanish soil. On Sundays during May and June pilgrims sporting colorful tunics and dragging wooden crosses arrive from one or another of the surrounding villages to pay homage to the Virgin.

The main feature of the complex is the 13th-century Gothic **Iglesia de La Colegiata** (collegiate church), shown at left, which displays the Virgin de Orreaga. In the cloister, the Capilla de San Agustin keeps the alabaster tomb bearing the likeness and remains of King Sancho VII "The Strong," whose crowning achievement was his victory at the battle of Navas de Tolosa. Not far from the church is the Gothic **Iglesia de Santiago** and the Romanesque **Espíritu Santo**, also known as the Charlemagne Silo. The latter was formerly the pilgrims' Hospital de Itzandegia and purportedly the site where Charlemagne buried Roland and his ill-fated rearguard. A museum inside displays metallurgical pieces along with a few paintings, sculptures and an interesting permanent exhibition on the Camino de Santiago *(☎ 94 879 04 80, open 10 am-2 pm and 3:30-5:30 pm; entry 3.20€ for access to the whole shebang)*.

Burguete/Auritz

The Camino de Santiago continues south to this old Hemingway haunt. The writer and avid outdoorsman stayed in the village's Hostal Burguete during trout fishing trips on the Río Irati, which he described in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. It is hard to imagine that the village has changed all that much since the '20s, and even harder to imagine finding something more to do than drink wine, which Hemingway (Jake in the book) took full advantage of.

Useful Information

Both of these villages are northeast of Pamplona on the N-135, which corresponds with the Camino de Santiago through much of Navarra. A daily bus from Pamplona stops in front of the Hostal La Posada on the N-135 in Roncesvalles. This village also has an **Oficina de Turismo** with useful information about the area and a list of hiking trails *(C/ Antiguo Molino, ☎ 94 876 03 01, oit.roncesvalles@cfnavarra.es)*.

Where to Stay

Hostal La Posada *(☎ 94 876 02 25, d 45€)* is one of the only places to sleep (and eat) in Roncesvalles. Head south to Burguete for more and better choices, including a number of *casas rurales* and that old-fashioned **Hostal Burguete** *(C/ San Nicolás 71, ☎ 94 876 00 05)*. A double with bath costs 40€, quite a bit more than Hemingway would have had to pay.

La Rioja

The reputation of La Rioja, if for only one reason, far outstrips the miniscule patch of land it encompasses. Ask an educated wino to name one Spanish red and he or she will no doubt say Rioja. Ask them to name a second and you may get a resounding "uhh...." With over 200 *bodegas* (wineries) in operation today and bottles on shelves throughout the world, La Rioja is undeniably wine country, continuing a tradition that dates to the Romans, if not earlier.

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La Rioja is Spain's smallest mainland region, encompassing two disparate zones. The Rioja Alta, or northern zone, conforms to the valley of the Río Ebro; its mild Atlantic climate and fertile soil make for the best of the Rioja wines; the epicenter of this industry is the town of Haro. The Pilgrim's route of the Camino de Santiago skirts the southern edge of this valley in its short course across the region, having endowed interesting medieval towns like Nájera and Santo Domingo de La Calzada with monasteries and a rare sense of history that comes with the pilgrims. The Rioja Baja, or Lower Rioja, claims the half of La Rioja south of the Camino de Santiago. This zone is hotter and drier than the north and buckled with mountains where you can ski or trace the petrified tracks of dinosaurs.

For such a tiny region to have attained autonomous status required a unique set of circumstances. First, the region's wine industry singled it out as a prosperous area capable of bearing the burden of its own regional government. Second, La Rioja has historically been linked to its neighbors the País Vasco and Navarra, with which it shares many customs. By separating the region from the two, which naturally should have formed one larger autonomous community, the government hoped to alleviate their shared desire to forge an independent nation. For the less culturally individualistic regions of Navarra and La Rioja, the tactic worked.

Logroño

You don't hear much of Logroño, the quiet capital of La Rioja on the banks of the Río Ebro. And while there isn't all that much to see or do in the city, most visitors are content to sip fine wine and wander the medieval streets of its old quarter for a day or two. The city's original name, Illo Gronio, means "the ford," in reference to the important crossing of the once mighty Río Ebro at this location. Pilgrims began to ford the river after 1016, the year King Sancho the Elder altered the Jacobean Way to Santiago de Compostela so as to pass through La Rioja. In the years since, the city has benefited tremendously from the pilgrims and, more recently, from the visitors who pass through the city before venturing off to the famous vine lands around it.

Useful Information

Tourism Offices: Logroño's **Oficina de Turismo** *(☎ 94 129 12 60)* is in a pavilion on the Paseo del Espolón next to the Casco Antiguo.

Adventure Guides: **Natura Extreme** *(Avda de La Paz 70, ☎ 94 125 10 54, www.naturaextreme.com, info@naturaextreme.com)* organizes all man-

ner of excursions in and around the mountains of La Rioja. These include guided hikes, canyoning, climbing, paragliding, climbing and rapelling and horseback riding.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación del Tren *(Plaza de Europa, s/n, ☎ 94 124 02 02)* is south of the Casco Antiguo. The easiest way to reach it is by walking away from the Paseo del Espolón on Calle del General Vara del Rey. At the roundabout on Calle de Los Duques de Nájera, make a left. Daily train destinations include **Haro** (30 minutes), **Bilbao** (3½ hours), **Zaragoza** (2½ hours), **Madrid** (five hours) and **Barcelona** (6½-seven hours).

By Bus: From the Paseo del Espolón, the Estación de Autobus *(Avda de España 1, ☎ 94 123 59 83)* is en route to the train station. Walk away from the old quarter on Calle del General Vara del Rey and make a left off Avda Pérez Galdós. Daily buses run to **Haro** (one hour), **Pamplona** (two hours), **Bilbao** (two hours), **Burgos** (two hours), **Madrid** (four hours), **Zaragoza** (two hours) and **Barcelona** (6½ hours).

By Car: Logroño is southwest from Pamplona on the N-111 and southeast of Bilbao on the A-68. The A-68 continues east to Zaragoza. To reach Burgos, take the A-68 west and at Miranda de Ebro pick up the A-1 heading southwest. From Madrid, head south on the N-111 through Soria and then pick up the A-11 southwest.

■ Festivals

Locals celebrate the unsuccessful French siege of 1521 on **Saint Barnaby's Day**, June 11. The festivals of **Saint Mathew** on September 21 mark the wine harvesting season with the traditional barefoot treading of the grapes. The first must is offered to the Virgin of Valvanera, the patron saint of Riojans.

■ Sightseeing

The **Paseo del Espolón** (Paseo Principe de Vergara), a landscaped pedestrian zone capped by a statue of the 19th century General Espartero, separates the newer parts of Logroño from the *Casco Antiguo*. In leaving the *paseo*, cross Calle Muro Fernandez de la Mata and follow Calle Marques de Vallejo to **Plaza del Mercado**, the heart of the city's historical quarter. Facing the plaza is the **Catedral de Santa María de la Redonda**, a 15th century work that has undergone extensive modifications, including the addition of its twin Baroque towers, known to locals as "Los Gamelos." The panel crucifixion inside is credited to Michelangelo. A block behind the church in Plaza de Amós, there is an interesting palace from which Calle Bartolomé leads to Logroño's oldest church, the **Iglesia de San Bartolomé**. Much of the church was built from the stones of the city's defensive wall, the only standing proof of which is the **Muralla de Revellín** and the **Puerta de Carlos V** at the northeastern edge of Casco Antiguo. The finely wrought portal and Mudéjar tower are the highlights of this 12th-century church.

Back in Plaza del Mercado, follow the arcaded Calle Portales in the opposite direction to reach the **Museo de La Rioja** *(open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm & 4-9*

pm, Sun 11:30 am-2 pm), a collection of artistic, ethological and archeological relics housed in the Baroque Palacio de Espartero. Calle Ruavieja, two blocks north of Plaza del Mercado, is identifiable by the scalloped shells cast in its pavement. This is the route pilgrims have traditionally followed through town on their long journey to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. At the eastern end of this road, on the corner of C/ Travieso Palacio, is the **Iglesia de Santa María del Palacio**, built in the 12th century over the site of a royal palace. Check out the interesting tambour, a local landmark known as La Aguja (The Needle). At the opposite end of this road is the **Iglesia de Santiago**, a rather boorish 16th-century construct. The ever-interesting sculpture of Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor Slayer) above the portal breathes some life into this regular pilgrim stop, in which the devout pay homage to the image of Logroño's patroness, Our Lady of Hope. On the riverside of the church is the **Fuente del Peregrino**, a fountain where pilgrims have long refilled their bladder bags, and next to it a curious game board is painted on the pavement called **Juego de Oca** (the Goose's Game), which tests pilgrims' knowledge of place names and icons of the Camino de Santiago.

> **Did You Know?** Spain has more vineyards than either France or Italy, accounting for almost half of all European vines. The downside is that the country's production level falls well below that of its more famous wine-producing neighbors.

■ Where to Stay

While there are numerous budget accommodations within the Casco Antiguo, the majority of Logroño's modern hotels are located a few blocks south, particularly along the Gran Vía. One exception in the upper-tier is **Tryp Bracos** *(C/ Bretón de los Herreros 29, ☎ 94 122 66 08, fax 94 122 67 54, tryp.bracos@solmelia.com, d: 100€)*, a modern four-star hotel on the southwestern edge of the old quarter. **Husa Gran Vía** *(C/ Gran Vía del Rey Don Juan Carlos 1, 71, ☎ 94 128 78 50, fax 94 128 78 51, d: 90-110€)* is another modern hotel a short walk from the old quarter. Its predominantly glass façade makes for a bright and airy interior with a small solarium, restaurant and cocktail bar. The pastel-colored rooms are classically decorated and furnished with the standard amenities. In the Casco Antiguo, **Hostal Niza** *(C/ Gallarza 13, ☎ 94 120 60 44)* offers cheery rooms, some with glass-encased balconies overlooking the old streets. Spacious private bathrooms are the winning feature of the hostel's simply furnished rooms. Slightly cheaper is the **Hostal La Numantina** *(C/ Sagasta 4, ☎ 94 125 14 11)*, directly behind the Catedral in the Casco Antiguo. While the rooms are slightly run-down, each has a full, private bath and television. The **Hostal de Peregrino** *(C/ Ruevieja 32, ☎ 94 126 02 34)*, on the coolest street in the Casco Antiguo is, as its name suggests, frequented by pilgrims en route to Santiago de Compostela. Rooms are austere but affordable at 35€ per double. **Camping La Playa** *(Avda de la Playa 6, ☎ 94*

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

125 22 53) is just across the Río Ebro from the Casco Antiguo next to the Las Norias sports complex. The small campsite offers a swimming pool, tennis court, cabanas, hot shoers, a market and all the necessary camper hook-ups. Adults are charged 3.60€ per night, and that again for a car or tent.

■ Where to Eat

In contrast to its northern neighbor the País Vasco, the cuisine of La Rioja is relatively unspectacular, generally country fare based on the Spanish staples of chorizo sausage, ham, lamb and, thank you ma'am, I'd like a lot of potatoes with that. Then again, visitors don't come to La Rioja for the food, but for its superb wines. La Rioja reds are world-class and arguably the greatest bargain in top-notch wines to be found. As with every Spanish region, just ask for *"un vino tinto de la casa"* (house red wine), and you'll be treated to a glass most likely from the Rioja Baja. The finer of these reds bear the level Rioja Alta or Rioja Alavesa, the two other wine producing regions of La Rioja.

DINING PRICE CHART

Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.

$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

To drink wine and munch on *tapas*, the best areas are Calle San Juan and Calle Laurel in the Casco Antiguo. **Casa Taza** *(C/ Laurel 5, ☎ 94 122 00 39)* is just such a place, with generous samplings of *tapas* put out around 2 pm and again at 9 pm, including tortillas, stuffed peppers, cured hams and a variety of meat stews and salads. On Calle San Juan, **Meson Ruiz** *(☎ 94 123 18 64)* serves one of the region's most common dishes, the *patatas a la riojana* (a potato and chorizo stew). **Restuarante Las Cubanas** *($$, C/ San Agustín 17, ☎ 94 122 00 50)* in the Casco Antiguo has one of the finest *bodegas* (wine cellars) in town. On top of this, the restaurant is one of the most popular in the city, serving traditional dishes, including potatoes with sausage, roast suckling pig and grilled cod Rioja-style at reasonable prices. For a do-it-yourself meal, stop in at the Plaza del Mercado, where the daily fresh fruit, vegetable and meat market is held.

WINE TASTING

To learn more about Rioja wine culture, sign up for one of the tasting courses held regularly in Logroño. **Vinissimo** *(C/ San Juan 23, ☎ 94 125 88 28)*, a bar and wine shop in the city, offers an introductory sampling of six wines for 10€. The **Consejo Regulador de Rioja** *(C/ Estambrera 52, ☎ 94 150 04 00)* holds a course in English on wine development and tasting techniques each Saturday from 10 am-1 pm. The 18€ allows a broad sampling of young and mature Rioja wines.

■ Excursions from Logroño

Haro

Nestled between the Ríos Ebro and Tirón in the western expanse of La Rioja known as the Rioja Alta, Haro is the unofficial capital of Rioja wine country. In 1892 the town became home to the Estación Enológica de Haro (Haro Laboratory for Vine Growing), the first European research facility of its kind devoted to advising its growers and sellers on quality control and distribution. Today the building is home to the **Museo del Vino de La Rioja** *(C/ Bretón de los Herreros 4, ☎ 94 131 05 47, open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm & 4-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*, an interesting museum with exhibits on the history, evolution and creation of Spanish wines.

If you happen to be in town on June 29th, don't hesitate to join the pilgrimage to the shrine of **San Felices de Bilibio**, the town's patron saint. Once there, the pilgrims (who have come armed with gallons of wine) unleash their 'weapons' from all manner of containers on other willful combatants during the **Batalla de Vino**. The mock battle, which lasts about an hour, pays tribute to the years of frontier battle between the Catholics who loved their wine and the Moors who, because of their beliefs, loathed the stuff.

> **City of Lights:** Haro was the first town in Spain to have electricity.

Useful Information

Daily trains and buses connect Haro with Logroño. The **bus station** is located in the Plaza Castañares de Rioja *(☎ 94 131 15 53),* while the **train station** is on Calle Estación *(☎ 94 131 15 97)*. With your own car, head south from Logroño to pick up the E-804 that runs east to the town. For information on nearby *bodegas*, check in at the **Oficina de Turismo** in the Plaza Monseñor Florentino Rodríguez *(☎ 94 130 33 66)*.

Bodegas

When touring the wine country, don't expect the kind of quaint little private wineries you find in California. Many of the *bodegas* in La Rioja are closed to the public except on special occasions, though some maintain a wholesale store where you can purchase their wines and many are changing their policies to accommodate the whims of tourists. On the upside, other smaller, family-run *bodegas* do allow impromptu visits. In any case, you'd do best to call in advance. **Bodegas Ramón Bilbao** *(Avda Santo Domingo 34, Haro, ☎ 94 131 02 95, www.bodegasramonbilbao.es)*, located on the outskirts of town, offers guided visits in English at 11 am on Thursdays and Fridays for 3€. In Gimileo, a small village just south of Haro, **Bodegas Santiago Ijalba, S.A., Viña Hermosa** *(Avda de la Rioja, s/n, ☎ 94 130 42 31, www.santiagoijalba.com)* allows visits at 12 and 3 pm Monday through Friday and at 12 on Saturday and Sunday. A minimum of five people must be on hand to get the tour. Call ahead if you'd like to arrange dinner at the winery.

■ Adventures on Foot

Dinosaurs that roamed the Iberian Peninsula during the cretaceous period, the last before their mysterious extinction, have left a visible imprint on the landscape of La Rioja, making it possible to follow trails in their gigantic footsteps. The main gateway into

La Rioja's erstwhile dinosaur territory is the mountain town of the **Enciso** in the southern Rioja Baja near the border with Castilla y León, which has the greatest concentration of fossilized foot beds nearby and a leading paleontology center. These sites, which were created millions of years ago when dinosaurs trudged through muddy bogs that later hardened to preserve their paths, exhibit a variety of prints, including long, winding trails of three-toed carnivores and more rounded depressions created by lumbering herbivores. It's worthwhile to stop in at the **Centro Paleontológico** *(☎ 94 139 60 93)* in the center of town, a glossy museum and research center with a multi-media exhibition, scaled-down dinosaur replicas, casts, fossilized remains and informative panels in both English and Spanish to explain it all. Here you can hire guides or pick up a pamphlet detailing the hiking trails in the area. Each of these is well signposted, though for the sites outside of Enciso you'll need a car. The most impressive include the nearest sites of **Valdecevillo** and **Virgen del Campo** and those around the towns of **Munilla** and **Cornago**.

From Logroño, you catch a daily bus to Calahorra, and then on to Enciso. With your own wheels, take the A-68 east from Logroño to Calahorra, then the LR-134 south to Arnedo, where you'll pick up the LR-115 running southwest to Enciso.

■ Adventures on Snow

The only ski resort of Spain's Sistema Ibérico Mountains is located in the south of La Rioja. **Estación Invierno Valdescaray** *(Avda Navarra 11, ☎ 94 174 60 05, fax 94 174 60 25, www.valdescaray.es)* is outside the town of Ezcaray in the region's Sierra de San Lorenzo. The base of the small resort has a ski-school and rental facilities. Its 14 runs (three easy green, four cruiser blues, six dimpled reds and one steep black) are serviced by four chairlifts and seven poma-lifts.

During the winter, buses run daily from Logroño to the resort. To reach Valdescaray, take the N-120 west from Logroño and at Santo Domingo de La Calzada turn south on the LR-111.

The winter sports company **Soleta** *(C/ Subida Soleta 4, ☎ 94 135 47 00, fax 94 135 47 00, www.ezcaray.com/soleta, soleta@riojainternet.com)* can point you in the right direction for snow-trekking and cross-country skiing. The place rents snowshoes and skis and offers guided trips for both (19€ per day in snowshoes; 21€ for cross-country skiing). In summertime, the GR-93 hiking trail, which crosses the entire Sierra, can be accessed from Ezcaray.

The Intoxicating Evolution of Rioja Wine

The *bodegas* (wineries) of La Rioja call on centuries of experience in creating their famous red wines and, to a lesser extent, their rosés and whites. The vine was a part of the Iberian Peninsula's landscape as early as 530 BC; Phoenicians, if not earlier Iberian inhabitants, were privy to winemaking skills and later the Romans would greatly increase production and improve upon their techniques. Still visible around the Rioja countryside are the rocks they hollowed out to use as vats, proof that the

Ebro Valley, with its ideal soil and favorable climate, has played a central role in the evolution of Spanish winemaking from the get go.

Yet, like the country, the wine of Spain has suffered from the peninsula's geographical isolation and historical resistance to change. Improvements in the winemaking industry have been slow in coming, though the surge of the last 30 years has finally erased the days when *bodegas* stored their wine in crude clay jars. Five hundred years of Moorish reign didn't help matters; the Arabs destroyed most, if not all, vines in the name of the Koran. Soon after the Moors were ousted by the Catholic monarchs, the *bodegas* of La Rioja began exporting small stores of their wines to Flanders and France; by the 1700's vine planting, and thus production, had increased considerably. Though Spain was the first European country to enact quality controls on its *bodegas*, it was notoriously lax in enforcing them until recent times. It was not until the late 19th century, by inadvertently capitalizing on a catastrophe, that Rioja wines began to attract the attention they warrant today.

Around 1870 the plant lice phylloxera began to devastate French vineyards. For once, the isolating effect of the Pyrenees mountains proved beneficial as the vine disease did not make its way into the peninsula until 1890; by that time growers had learned to prevent the disease by grafting resistent American roots onto their vines. In the interim, French producers began to import wines from the Rioja region to supplement their own measly stores. As much as 11 million gallons of Rioja wine was reportedly shipped to France each month during this period. The French, in turn, passed on their Bordeaux methods for making and ageing wines, which resulted in smoother flavors and aromas in the Rioja wines. While techniques have continued to evolve (the introduction of stainless steel casks to many of the Spanish *bodegas* is just one example), the art of fine wine-making still rests in the hands, the hard work, and the knowledge of the artisans who know when to raise their glasses and declare "salud."

■ The Grapes

Tempranillo: The indigenous grape par excellence, accounting for 50-80% of any bottle of Rioja red.

Garnacha Roja: A far more common and less reliable grape of red wines.

Mazuelo: A pungent grape producing wines rich in tannin and sharp to the palate. The French *Carignan Noir.*

Graciano: An indigenous, but uncommon grape producing highly aromatic reds.

Viura: The main white grape variety, used especially for mature white wines.

Malvasia: White grape that lends a fruity aroma to young wines and acquires a golden hue with age.

White garnacha: Akin to the Garnacha Roja, an indigenous but unexceptional white wine grape.

■ The Regions

Bottles of La Rioja wines will be identified with one of the three sub-regions that produced them. Those from **Rioja Alta** (Upper Rioja) are generally the longest-lived and smoothest. **Rioja Alavesa** wines are equally exceptional and characterized by their strong aromas, though these, in fact, come from

the País Vasco side of the Río Ebro. Both of these wines are generally produced with tempranillo grapes. The hotter region of the **Rioja Baha** (Lower Rioja) produces younger, lighter wines, usually from the Garnacha Roja grape.

■ The Process

The grape harvest, which begins in September, is a time of great celebration and backbreaking work. Once the vines are ripe, pickers use small blades known as *corquetas* to separate the grape clusters from the vine; the grapes are loaded into baskets and delivered to the *bodegas*, upon which both growers and winemakers celebrate with a feast. While the vine twigs that bore the fruit are being trimmed to the trunk in preparation for the coming harvest, the grapes begin their evolution to wine. Red wines are produced in one of two ways: for those that will be aged a considerable length of time, the stalks are removed before fermentation; for younger wines that can be drunk within a year, grapes are left whole. During fermentation the must is flipped and the temperature is kept constant so that the product acquires the desired balance of color, body and aroma. After fermentation the wine is separated from the solid matter and drained into holding vats, where it is strictly analyzed before the next stage of development. During the ageing process the wine is stored for a specific amount of time (dependent on its end quality) in 225-liter oak casks. This allows the wine to absorb tannins and develop its subtle wood aroma; all the while air penetrating the cask modifies its chemical structure through oxidation. From the oak casks the wine is decanted into bottles and aged until the time comes for the cork to be removed. As a general rule, the more mature wine, the smoother the time.

■ The Results

Crianzas: Wines in their third year that have spent a minimum of one year in oak casks.

Sin Crianzas: The youngest wines, smooth and deep in color; generally served within the first year.

Reservas: Wines from exceptional harvests, with at least one year of maturing in oak and two in the bottle.

Gran Reserves: Exceptional vintage wines aged a minimum of two years in oak casks and three years in the bottle.

Along the Camino de Santiago

Two cities warrant attention on La Rioja's stretch of the Camino de Santiago, the 1,000-year-old pilgrimage route to the relics of St. James in Galicia's Santiago de Compostela. The towns of Nájera and Santo Domingo de la Calzada, each with impressive monasteries, have welcomed famished pilgrims since 1016, the year King Sancho rerouted the southern, Jacobean way to pass through La Rioja.

■ Useful Information

Buses run daily from Logroño to both Nájera (stop on the Paseo de San Julián) and Santo Domingo de la Calzada (stop in the Plaza de Hermosilla). The N-120 runs west from Logroño to Nájera and past it to Santo Domingo. Nájera's **Oficina de Turismo** is at

Calle Contantino Garrán 8, ☎ 94 136 00 41; Santo Domingo's is housed in the Casa de Trastamara *(C/ Mayor 70, ☎ 94 134 12 30)*. In Nájera, **Hotel San Fernando** *(Paseo de San Julian 1, ☎ 94 136 37 00)* is a three-star hotel overdue for renovations. Problem is, you'll be hard-pressed to find a nicer establishment in town. Doubles with private bath go for 50€. In Santo Domingo, on the other hand, the **Parador de Santo Domingo de La Calzada** *(Plaza del Santo 3, ☎ 94 134 03 00, fax 94 134 03 25, stodomingo@parador.es)* has turned the pilgrim's hospice that the Saint founded into a splendid place to spend the night. Doubles range from 91-115€ per night.

■ Nájera

From 918 to 1076 Nájera was the Royal seat of the Kingdom of Pamplona-Nájera and, as such, the lead political center during the early stages of the Christian Reconquest. Around this time, the Moors reoccupied the nearby town of Calahorra, spreading fears among the royals of Nájera that an attack was imminent. Legend holds that, while hunting one afternoon, the falcon of King García Sánchez III flew into a cave after a partridge; when the King chased after it, he was witness to an image of the Virgin Mary with child, which the king took as a sign he would be victorious in the pending battle. Once he had defeated the Moors and retaken the town of Calahorra, the king ordered that the Monasterio de Santa María la Real be constructed at the site of the cave. The cave is preserved at the foot of the nave of the present 16th-century Gothic monastery. A royal pantheon bears 12 tombs of kings and queens from the dynasties of the 10th and 11th centuries, while in the Gothic cloister with its notable plateresque tracery, later kings have been laid to rest.

■ Santo Domingo de la Calzada

This town owes its name to an enterprising local hermit who, in the 11th century, decided he should do something for the pilgrims who continually passed through town. He founded a hermitage and, once that was successful, went on to build a new road, a bridge, and inns (all of which stand today). Santo Domingo was no slouch when it came to miracles, either. During one such event, he intervened on behalf of a straggling foreign pilgrim who had been falsely accused of stealing from his inn and sentenced to hanging. The unwitting culprit was hanged all right, but lived to tell about it thanks to the miracle of Santo Domingo. When the town lord heard of this over dinner, he declared it impossible, for he had seen the thief as surely dead as the roast hen on his own plate. Hearing this, the hen leapt to its feet and began to squawk. Inside the Catedral de Santo Domingo de la Calzada, founded as a reward for the hermit's successful work, a hen cage symbolizes the Saint's miracle. The church was begun in 1158 but finished off in a mostly Gothic vein, with traces of the earlier Romanesque church, Baroque touches and a Renaissance tower. The tomb of the saint fronts the beautiful plateresque altarpiece.

El País Vasco

Each of the 17 autonomous communities in Spain is proud of its uniqueness, but none is so fiercely nationalistic and culturally disparate from the rest as the País Vasco. The name itself, "the Basque Country," embodies the proud, bold, individualistic spirit of the people here. For a land that has been historically isolated, whose people have fiercely resisted outside influence since Roman times, the years of cultural suppression under Franco, when the Basques were forbidden from speaking their own language and practicing their cultural traditions hit hard. The struggle to be heard, the outcries for sovereignty have spawned fear, as a result of the terrorist organization ETA (see *Government & Economy*, page 19 in the Introduction), which, since its inception, has killed over 600 people in the name of independence. Frustration is apparent in the miles of graffiti damning Spanish culture and government and, since the demise of Franco, a re-flowering of Basque culture.

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Euskara, a language unrelated to Castilian Spanish, is fundamental to the Basque way of life. Like the Basque people themselves, this tongue derived from unknown origins. It remains to be proven whether the language of Euskara arrived with nomadic tribes from the Caucasus Mountains in Africa and, for that matter, whether or not the Basque people are truly descendants of Europe's earliest inhabitants, Cro-Magnon man. Far from a dying language (though Franco tried his best), Euskara is once again taught to schoolchildren beginning at an early age and commonly heard in the streets among teenagers and adults alike. Unlike the Catalans, who prefer to speak their own language to the scornful exclusion of Castellano, the Basque people *do* speak their own language but don't mind speaking Spanish to foreigners. While other Spaniards consider them to be guarded, even introverted, you'll likely come away with the feeling that the Basque people are complex but not unfriendly, intelligent and certainly idealistic.

The País Vasco (Euskadi) is the easternmost autonomous region of what is known as Green Spain, a verdant swath of land along the northern Atlantic coast that, some say, resembles Switzerland more than it does Spain. Rain and clouds are common and the weather is generally breezy and cool, though the summer months do allow for a stretch of skin-scorching beach days. The region is bordered in the west by Cantabria and in the east (from north to south) by France, Navarra and La Rioja. It is divided into the provinces of Guipúzkoa, Vizkaya and Alava. The two main cities, Bilbao with its famous Guggeneheim Museum and San Sebastián with its picturesque setting, are located on the coast of the Bay of Biscay.

Though there are plenty of opportunities for hiking in the empty inlands of the País Vasco, coastal sports like surfing and boating are the main activities, along with the unique Basque game of pelota and, of course, the adventures of eating. The País Vasco, with more gourmet restaurants and Michelin stars to its credit than any other Spanish region, is truly a culinary delight. To get away from Spain without leaving the country, there is no better choice than the País Vasco.

> *"In the Basque Country the land looks very rich and green and the houses and villages look well off and clean."*
>
> *Ernest Hemingway, Fiesta*

El País Vasco
Cantabrian Sea
Bermeo
Lekeitio
Hondarribia
Donostia-
San Sebastián
Lezo
Pobeña
to Santander
240
631
635
638
Derio
Gernika-Lumo
Markina-
Xemein
Zumaia
634
N-1
E-70
Bilbao
Usurbil
Andoain
636
Elgoibar
A-8
Bedia
Ermua
Azkoitia
Sodupe
to Burgos
Iurreta-
Durango
Areta
Artea
Elorrio
Tolosa
A-15
A-68
240
623
Urrextu
1
Ordizia
Leitza
Otxandio
to Vitoria-Gastiez
to Altsasu-Alsasua
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San Sebastián (Donastia)

Travelers to Spain seem to love to spread the good word on San Sebastián. "If there is one place visit on Spain's north coast, this is it," a frequent visitor to the city once told me. It is the kind of place to spend a honeymoon or an afternoon, a setting pretty enough to spark romantic embers but compact enough to be appreciated in a few short hours. The city – from the old, character-laden Parte Vieja with its copious *pintxo* bars to the elegant Belle Époque neighborhood that developed around the turn of the 20th century as the city came into favor among Europe's high society – follows the arc of a serene bay sandwiched between two wooded hills with a sweeping expanse of sand running between them. An island at the entrance to the bay shields its waters from the fierce Atlantic currents. The locals, known as Donastiarras, do what the tourists have learned to emulate: some surf or sunbathe, others bounce from bar to bar in large groups drinking glasses of *txakoli*. Families dine on the finest cuisine Spain has to offer and couples stroll hand in hand along the maritime promenade as the sun sets and the decibel level in the Parte Vieja ratchets up.

■ History

San Sebastián (pop. 180,000), capital of the País Vasco's northeastern province of Guipúzcoa (Gipuzkoa), is a few miles from France and a world apart from traditional Spain; it is a hotbed for the fiercely independent regionalism characterizing the País Vasco, where young and old Donastiarras alike – contrary to popular opinion – talk freely and openly of their desires to forge an independent country. Since the 11th century the city developed as an important port owing to its proximity to France, its location on the Camino de Santiago and its naturally defensible situation.

During the 18th century, as the Peninsular War waged on, the city was occupied by France, liberated and then reoccupied. In coming to the city's aid, an Anglo-Portuguese fleet was successful in liberating the city once and for all, but their actions resulted in the great fire of 1813 (the 12th fire the city had endured), which all but destroyed what the French had not.

Queen Isabel II, seeking to alleviate her skin problems by bathing in seawater on the advice of her doctor, sparked a renewal of interest in the city when she made it a summertime royal retreat in 1840. Subsequent royals followed suit and by the end of the 19th century San Sebastián had become a fashionable retreat for many well-to-do Europeans. The defensive walls were torn down and the city's gradual expansion and beautification continued until the Civil War and Franco put a damper on the Basque way of life. Since Franco's death, San Sebastián has emerged as the embodiment of Basque culture, a graceful modern city whose citizens welcome tourists and ask only that you please refer to their city as Donostia.

■ Intelligible Gibberish

No one is quite sure where the Basque people acquired their strange language of Euskara, one of Spain's three regional languages and by far its weirdest: a rapid firing of syllables and chukka-chukka sounds (the tx that you see everywhere is pronounced "ch"). It bears no relationship to other Eu-

ropean languages though ironically the only point linguists seem to agree on is that it is likely the oldest language on the European continent. Euskara suffered a major setback during the mid-20th century when Franco outlawed the use of it and every other regional Spanish language. Since the dictator's time the language has been fully revived and established as one of the two official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community. Euskara is central to the unique Basque culture and the region's sense of individualism. You'll notice that most signs in the País Vasco bear both the Castellano and Euskara versions; in many cases the Castellano has been spray-painted over.

English	Spanish	Euskara
Basque Country	País Vasco	Euskadi
welcome	beinvenido	ongi etorri
hello	olah	kaixo
goodbye	adios	agur
yes	sí	bai
no	no	ez
good morning	buenos días	egunon
good night	buenas noches	gabon
day	día	eguna
night	noche	gaba
please	por favor	mesedez
restaurant	restaurante	jatetxea
hotel	hotel	hotela
beach	playa	hondartza
city center	el centro	erdialdea
street	calle	kalea
toilet	servicio	komuna

■ Useful Information

Tourism

The **Oficina de Turismo de País Vasco** on Paseo de los Fueros 1 *(☎ 94 302 31 50, www.euskadi.net/turismo)*, on the western side of the Río Urumea, keeps information on the entire autonomous community. The **Centro de Attración y Turismo** *(Reina Regente 8, ☎ 94 348 11 66, www.paisvasco.com/donostia)* carries more information on the province of Guipúzcoa, though you'll be able to stock up on maps and basic info covering the whole of the País Vasco.

El Tren Turístico de Donostia-San Sebastián operates a 40-minute Txu-Txu (pronounced "choo-choo") train tour. Tickets for the train, which departs the Plaza de Cervantes from 11 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, can be purchased

at tourism offices or at the train ticket booth in the plaza. *(Central de Reservas y Actividades Turísticas, ☎ 94 342 29 73, www.sansebastianturismo.com; adults 2.70€, children 1.50€.)*

■ Adventure Guides

The **Real Club Náutico** *(C/ Igentea 9)*, based out of the boat-shaped building at the eastern end of Playa de La Concha, offers windsurfing, kitesurfing and kayaking excursions and equipment. **Ostargi Parapente Eskola** *(C/ José María Soroa 20, ☎ 94 327 81 96, www.urruti.com, urruti2000@euskalnet.net)* specializes in paragliding trips from launch sites near San Sebastián. A 30-minute flight accompanied by a guide in a two-seater costs 41€, while a certification course lasting four days costs 198€. **Buceo Euskadi** *(C/ Igara 53, ☎ 94 331 23 13, fax 94 360 34 74, www.buceoeskadi.com, buceo@buceoeuskadi.com)* has long been the main scuba diving shop in town. The preferred dives in the area are made off the coast of Hondarrabia and Mutriku and cost around 30€. Another dive shop is **Scuba Du** *(Paseo del Muelle 23, ☎ 94 342 24 26)*.

■ Festivals

In mid-August, San Sebastián's **Semana Grande** is a raucous spectacle celebrating the Virgen de la Asunción with stage performances, street dances and sporting events capped by a huge fireworks competition. The celebration of the city's patron saint on January 20th is accompanied by the all-day, all-night pounding of the Tamborrada. These drums are carried through the streets by large groups, the last of which is the children's drum parade made up of thousands of young Basques marching through the streets dressed as military drummers.

During September San Sebastián hosts Spain's biggest film festival, the **Festival de Cine**. During this glamorous two-week spectacle you'll see directors, famous Spanish and international actors, fans and of course the paparazzi running through the city from one red carpet to the next. Entrants vie for the coveted Concha de Oro (Golden Shell), the prize awarded to the year's best films. Each day fans crowd the entrance to the **Hotel María Cristina** which accommodates many of the biggest names, before heading to the **Palacio Kursaal** in the Gros district, the main venue for premiers. The avant-garde palace, at the corner of Playa de la Zurriola just across the Puente de la Zurriola from the Parte Vieja, was designed by Rafael Moneo and inaugurated in 1999. With over 10,000 glass panels shimmering a pale green each night, only the stars outshine it. Acquiring tickets to the festival is no easy matter and, if you show up on the day of a premiere, chances are the seats will all be filled. For information and tickets prior to the festival, call ☎ 94 300 30 00.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: San Sebastián has two train stations. The **RENFE Estación del Norte** *(Avenida de Francia, ☎ 90 224 02 02)* east of the Río Urumea serves the major cities outside of the País Vasco. From the Plaza de España west of the river, cross the Puente Santa Catalina to the Plaza de Euskadi and make a right on Avda de Francia. Daily destinations include **Madrid** (8½ hours), **Pamplona** (two hours), **Barcelona** (8½ hours), **León** (4½ hours), **Burgos** (four hours) and **Paris** (10 hours).

The smaller **Estación de Amara** *(Plaza Easo 9, ☎ 94 247 08 15)* generally services regional destinations. To reach it, follow the Calle de Easo eight blocks away from its dead end at the Playa de La Concha at its intersection with Avda de la Libertad.

By Bus: The Estación de Autobuses is in Plaza de Pío XII, reached by following the Río Urumea south from the city center. Daily destinations include **Bilbao** (one hour), **Santander** (2½ hours), **Madrid** (six hours), **Barcelona** (6½ hours), **Pamplona** (one hour) and **Burgos** (three hours).

By Car: The Autovía A-8 runs west from France, through San Sebastián as far as Bilbao. If you're headed east in the direction of Barcelona, the fastest route passes through Pamplona on the A-15, after which you'll need to pick up the A-68 running through Zaragoza. The easiest way to reach Madrid is via Bilbao, where you'll pick up the A-68 south as far as Vitoria-Gasteiz. From here, the A-1 runs southwest to Burgos, where the N-1 picks up in the direction of Madrid.

■ Orientation

Locals often use the carousel in the **Jardines de Alderdi-Eder** as a landmark when giving directions in San Sebastián. These gardens, overlooking the Bahía de La Concha at the eastern end of the Playa de La Concha near the base of Monte Urgull, serve as a perfectly central point from which to explore the city. Here, the beachside promenade of La Concha begins and continues around the bay to the end of the Playa de Ondarreta. Backing the gardens is the **Centro**, a posh, older area of fine restaurants and designer stores. The **Alameda del Boulevard** is a large plaza and vehicle thoroughfare running from the *Ayuntamiento*, or town hall, a commanding 19th-century edifice originally built as the Gran Casino which faces the gardens, to the Puente de la Zurriola crossing the Río Urumea. On the far side of the river is the *barrio* known as **Gros**, which retains its own character despite its proximity to the bustling city center and which sees few tourists even though it boasts the best surfing beach in the city (**Playa de Zurriola**). The **Alameda del Boulevard** separates the Centro from the Parte Vieja. Spread in a rough grid around the arcaded Plaza de la Constitución that once served as the town hall headquarters and weekend bull rink, this area of narrow streets packed with small *tapas* bars, clubs and restaurants is the reason many come to San Sebastián. It is also the noisiest and dirtiest part of an otherwise immaculate city.

■ Sightseeing

Religious Buildings

Having withstood the ravages of countless fires, **Calle 31 de Agosto** is the oldest surviving street in San Sebastián and as such the city's most venerated. Perhaps not coincidentally, the street is book-marked by two of the city's holiest sights, the **Iglesia de Santa María del Coro** and the **Iglesia de San Vicente**. The former was erected over Roman ruins in the 18th century. Its Baroque façade is embellished with a sculpture depicting an arrow-marked San Sebastián, the city's patron saint. Inside, a 16th-century oil image of the city's patroness, the Virgen del Coro, adorns the altarpiece of the basilica.

The Iglesia de San Vicente at the opposite end of the Calle 31 de Agosto is the city's oldest church, constructed in the 16th century in a modest Gothic style. In what is known as the Romantic area of the city, built in the 19th century after the city's walls were demolished, the 75-m (246-foot) spire of the **Catedral del Buen Pastor** rises high above the city. It occupies one of San Sebastián's most fanciful plazas, shared by the **Edificio de Correos** and the **Koldo Mitxelena** cultural center, both of which date from the same period. The neo-Gothic Cathedral of the Good Shepherd was built at the end of the 19th century when this Bella Époque neighborhood was fast developing into the in place for European high-society to congregate.

Gypsy Reverence

In a country with a well-documented distrust if not outright scorn for gypsies – those migrating bands that seem to be coming from and going to nowhere in particular – San Sebastián sets itself apart. Each winter, leading up to the grand spectacle of Carnival, locals dirty their faces and dawn bandanas and large hoop earrings in imitation and – some might boldly venture – appreciation of the gypsies who traditionally arrived for Carnival each year to share their wares and add their own colorful element to the festivities. During the fiesta of Caldereros, the gypsy-clad Donastiarras, known as Tinkers, bang pots and pans with hammers and sing a spirited rendition in homage to the free-spirited nomads that "came from Hungary" and always left when the party was over.

Museums

In the Parte Vieja, the **Musée San Telmo** *(Plaza de Zuloaga 1, ☎ 94 342 49 70, open Mon.-Sat. 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 4-8 pm, Sun. 10:30 am-2 pm)* fills a former Dominican monastery founded in 1541 with a rich assortment of archeological, ethnographic and/or artistic relics dedicated to Basque culture. Along with the works of painter Ignacio Zuloaga, enormous murals by José María Sert adorn the walls of the old church and gigantic stone funerary crosses (*estelas*) unique to the Basque country fill the Renaissance courtyard.

In the port area, the **Musée Naval** *(Kaia Pasalekua 24, ☎ 94 343 00 51, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm)* stands beside San Sebastián's **Aquarium** *(Paseo del Muelle, Plaza Carlos Blasco de Imaz, ☎ 94 344 00 99, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-7 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-8 pm, www.aquariumss.com)*, otherwise known as the Palacio del Mar. The aquarium doubles as an oceanographic museum, with replicas of ancient ships, a 14-m (45-foot) skeleton of the last whale caught off the Guipuzcoana coast in the 19th century and exhibitions devoted to various fishing techniques, from the medieval whaling industry to the technologically advanced methods of today. The aquarium has over 5,000 fish (including sharks) and an underwater tunnel that allows a 360-degree view of whatever happens to be swimming by.

The **Naval Museum** next door is housed in the18th-century hall of the former mariner's guild, with exhibits most notably dedicated to the construction and operation of seagoing vessels from the past to the present day. The **Musée Diocesano** *(Plaza Sagrada Familia 11, ☎ 94 343 00 51, open*

Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm) in the Amara district south of the Parte Vieja, along the river, houses a collection of 13th- to 19th-century religious art belonging to the Diocese of San Sebastián.

Two museums just outside of the city are worth mentioning. The **Museum Cemento Rezola** is a recent addition and a strange one at that. As you may have guessed, the museum is dedicated to the history, development and implications of cement throughout the world. To reach the museum, catch the Berri-Añorga bus #25 from San Sebastián. *(Avda de Añorga 36, ☎ 94 336 41 92, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm plus 5-8 pm on Sat., www.museumcemento@terra.es.)* The **Museo Chillida-Leku** is an open-air museum created by the sculptor Eduardo Chillida to permanently display his work as well as that of his contemporaries. The park-like setting encompasses 40 large, ponderous sculptures crafted from either iron or granite. A stone farmhouse, which Chillida purchased in 1982, now serves as the main information center, with a library, auditorium and gift shop. To reach this museum, Autobuses Garayar depart every half-hour from Calle de Okendo in San Sebastián. By car, take the N-1 highway seven km (four miles) south from San Sebastián, turn east on the G1-2132 road, direction Hernani, and watch for the museum signs fast approaching. *(Bº Jauregui 66, ☎ 94 333 60 06, open Mon.-Sat. July-August 10:30 am-7 pm, Sept.-June 10:30 am-3 pm, Sun. 10:30 am-3 pm, chillida@Eduardo-chillida.com.)*

■ Adventures on Foot

San Sebastián offers urban walking opportunities without all the hassles of dodging cars and weaving through mobs of people.

The most obvious walk is along the beach following the maritime promenade **Paseo de La Concha**, one that local Donostiarras make on a nightly basis during their leisurely *paseos*. The promenade stretches over seven uninterrupted kilometers (4.2 miles), beginning at the Parque de Alderdi-Eder at the east end of the Playa de La Concha near the *ayuntamiento* (town hall). Continuing around the beach, you'll reach the Parque de Miramar, which marks the beginning of the Playa de Ondarreta. The Tudor-style mansion in the park, known as the **Palacio de Miramar**, was built for Queen María Cristina as a summer residence. At the end of the Playa de Ondarreta, the **Paseo del Peine del Viento** climbs into the granite seaside rocks with strange iron sculptures protruding from them. Known as the **Peine del Viento** (Windcombs), the three claw-like sculptures were created by the famed Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida in collaboration with architect Luis Peña Ganchegui.

The second walk is up to **Mount Urgull**, overshadowing the Bahía de La Concha in the east, next to the Parte Vieja. From the Playa de La Concha it is impossible to miss this green hill and the enormous statue of the Sacred Heart atop it. The figure of Christ was created by Federico Coullant and added in 1950. A hike up to the top of this military rampart turned city park is time well spent, as the views of the bay, the Isla de Santa Clara and the old quarter are picture-perfect. The place to start the hike (which is a 10-minute breeze) is the Iglesia de Santa María del Coro on Calle de Agosto at the northern edge of the old quarter, though you can just easily begin from the Paseo Nuevo (known locally as the *rompeolas*, or wave breaker, for obvious reasons) that wraps around the hill from the mouth of the Río Urumea to the bay. At

the top, educational placards describe various aspects of the **Castillo de la Mota**, including the battlement walls and rusty canons that once guarded the town and bay from stealthy French and English invaders.

> **Tip:** To find out exactly what's going on each month, pick up a copy of the *Donosti Aisia*, a pamphlet with current listings on dining and cultural events ranging from theater, to art exhibitions and live music.

Of the city's parks, the **Parque de Aiete** is the most colorful, situated on a hill south of the Playa de La Concha shared by the **Palacio de Aiete**. The palace was built in 1878 for the Dukes of Bailén and has since hosted a succession of kings, queens and one infamous dictator, each to the exclusion of the general public, which wasn't allowed onto the park grounds until 1977.

Closer to town and a much more manageable walk is the **Parque Cristina Enea**. It is on the east side of the river across the ornate María Cristina Bridge which was built in 1903 and adorned with sculptures, mock-sentry points and towering lampposts (needless to say, you can't miss it). This is the largest of San Sebastián's parks, characterized by the peacocks and giant sequoias that tower over a variety of other non-indigenous trees, including gingkos, palosanto and magnolias.

The **Parque de Miramar** between the Concha and Ondarreta beaches offers a terrific view of the bay, though it is generally more crowded than its counterparts.

For the best view, make the hike or ride up to the top of Monte Igeldo, the green hill at the western end of the bay opposing Monte Urgull on the far side. The easiest way up is to catch the funicular from Plaza de Funicular at the end of Playa de Ondarreta. In just a few minutes you'll be whisked to the top, where the views of the city and sea are the best to be had. Otherwise, a winding trail leads to the top from the same plaza and it's not too bad a hike. The **Parque de Atracciones**, an amusement park at the top, has all the standard gigs, including bumper cars, a roller coaster, fright houses and water slides *(☎ 94 321 05 64)*.

■ Adventures on Water

The Bahía de La Concha shelters two of San Sebastián's three beaches. The largest, **Playa de La Concha**, along with its extension, **Playa de Ondarreta**, form one long, sandy arc between the Monte Urgull and Monte Igeldo. For calm water, views of the Isla Santa Clara and the chance to swim out for a rest on the *gabarrones* (rafts) floating in the bay, these beaches are it. In the summertime they'll be crowded, but rarely so much so that you can't stake a claim. **Playa de Zurriola** (sometimes called the Playa de Gros) is San Sebastián's other beach, located east of the Río Urumea in the Gros district. With a dependable right/left beach break, it is recognized as a surfers' domain, though areas away from the surf have been cordoned off for the exclusive use of swimmers. A surfing school on the beach offers lessons and rentals, as does **Pukas Surf Shop** *(Calle Mayor 5, ☎ 94 342 72 28)* in the Parte Vieja.

While far from deserted, the **Isla Santa Clara** at the entrance to the Bahía de La Concha is an inviting patch of land to stroll around, share a picnic or just see San Sebastián from a different perspective. During the summertime,

rowboats and sea kayaks can be rented at the port or, for a less strenuous jaunt, a boat run by the Ciudad de San Sebastián can be boarded to reach the small island. The company also offers tours in small boats around the Donostiarran coastline.

■ Nightlife

Rumor has it that San Sebastián's Parte Vieja has more bar space per square foot than anywhere else in the world. True or not, by all accounts, there are a helluva lot of small bars in this area of San Sebastián, though many cater to the 10 pm *pintxo* and *txakoli* drinkers and close down before midnight. Those that don't include the **Tas Tas Disco-Bar** on Calle Fermín Calbetón, one of the main *marcha* (party) streets in the city. This bar, like many in the area during the summer, is crowded with international travelers lured by handouts advertising two-for-one happy hour from 8-11:30 pm. Down the street, the **Tic Tac Disco Pub** sees fewer foreigners and plays better music; house music is preferred to cheesy pop, though Tom Jones occasionally filters into the mix. Stairs lead down to the bar and a small dance floor so crowded that those of us with two left feet can feel like Justin Timberlake, if only for a few hours.

Zibbibo *(Plaza Sarriegi)* is an Irish pub nearby; enough said. For a change of pace, the **Gran Kursaal Casino** *(Calle Mayor)* offers the chance to lose money at craps, blackjack and roulette. You'll need dressy clothes to get through the doors and a passport to gamble. The best clubs in San Sebastián are outside of the Parte Vieja, including **Ku** and **Illumbre** in the Plaza de Toros and **Pentium** in the Antiguo district. When the bars die down, these clubs heat up with a mix of techno and house. Unless you're high on sangria, you'll most likely want to catch a taxi to these spots.

■ Where to Stay

Be forewarned, the hotels and especially the *pensiones* in San Sebastián stay full during the summer and often times months before. Although some of the cheaper accommodations won't take reservations over the phone (since people often don't bother showing up), don't be shy about calling ahead to reserve a room. Judging from personal experience, finding a cheap place for one person is harder to do than not finding a *pintxo* bar in the city. Two of the *pensiones* listed below have single rooms – otherwise expect to pay for an empty bed.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

The **Hotel María Cristina** *(C/ Oquendo 1, ☎ 94 343 76 00, fax 94 343 76 76, hmc@westin.com, d 300-390€)* is the flashiest and priciest hotel in San Sebastián. Built in 1909 in the neo-plateresque style, it is the highlight of the Belle Époque neighborhood that grew up around it at the start of the 20th century as European socialites flocked to San Sebastián. Its architect, Charles Mewes, was also responsible for Madrid's notorious Ritz hotel. The lavish rooms are decorated in the Belle Époque vein and offer views of the Río Urumea and the Cantabrian Sea.

Hotel Europa *(C/ San Martin 52, ☎ 94 347 08 80, fax 94 347 17 30, www.hotel-europa.com, d 126-152€)* occupies a historical corner building in the Zona Romantica, 50 meters (164 feet) off Playa de La Concha. Its rooms, though far from extravagant, are classically appointed and fully furnished with satellite television and full baths. A valet will drive your car to the underground parking lot and the maids will slip the newspaper under your door daily. The hotel's **Restaurante El Comedor** specializes in Basque cuisine.

Budget

Pension Amaiur Osatua *(C/ 31 de Agosto 44, ☎ 94 342 26 94)* offers the finest budget accommodations in the Parte Vieja. Each of the rooms is airy and cutely decorated with bright linens and draperies. The host couldn't be nicer. As the word is out on this pension, you'll want to call well ahead in the summer to book a room. A double costs up to 45€ per night. **Pension Aussie** on Calle San Jeronimo is run by a friendly chap named Skippy; his Basque parents skipped out of the country to Australia during Franco's reign and returned some years later, once Skippy had grown up and fully mastered the Aussie dialect. Having lived in San Sebastián for over 20 years, Skippy is a fountain of information on the city if you venture a question. The rooms, which range from singles to multiple beds, are prototypical of *pensiones* with sparse furnishings and shared bathrooms. Mind you pronounce Aussie the right way: "Auzzie." Singles cost 18€. **Pension Anne** *(C/ Esterlines 15, ☎ 94 342 24 38)* has been recently renovated and gives Pension Amaiur a run for its money. Each of the rooms is bright and decorated with a personal touch. Give this place a shot if you're having trouble finding single rooms during the summer; the small, windowless room right next to the entrance seems to always be available, and it has a television. Doubles range from 35-55€ depending on the season.

If everything is booked up in the Parte Vieja, try Calle San Martín which runs from the Río Urumea near Puente María Cristina to Playa de La Concha and is loaded with hostels: **Pension La Concha** *(#51, ☎ 94 345 03 89, d 36-45€)*; **Pension Donastiarra** *(#6, ☎ 94 342 61 67, d 45-65€)*; **Pension Alemana** *(#53, ☎ 94 346 25 44, d 55-70€)*; or the nicer **Hostal-Residencia Bahía** *(#54, ☎ 94 346 39 14, d 60-80€)*.

Camping

Igueldo *(Paseo del Padre Orkolaga, ☎ 94 321 45 02, fax 94 328 04 11)* is the nearest campsite, located five km (three miles) outside of San Sebastián. From the city, follow the signs for the *carretera* to the Barrio de Igueldo; buses also run from the city to the campsite. It is a large, self-sufficient park with full facilities and free access to hot showers (a rarity). 20€ reserves a parcel, which covers two campers, a car or caravan, water, electricity and gas.

■ What to Eat & Where

That the cuisine of the País Vasco is Spain's best is an understatement. It is also its most ambitious, creative and internationally renowned. San Sebastián is home to three of the region's greatest chefs, Juan Mari Arzak, Pedro Subijana and, last but certainly not least, Karlos Arguiñano, whose national cooking show *Menu del Día* has made him a household personality throughout the country. Their cuisine is

generally referred to as Nueva Cocina Vasca, as it is a continually evolving style that, although based on the traditions of Basque cooking and its emphasis on seafood, goes far beyond the bounds of regional expectations.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Arguiñano's restaurant, the aptly named **Karlos Arguiñano** *($$$$, C/ Medilauta 13, ☎ 94 313 00 00)* occupies a small, historical palace in the town of Zarautz, a short drive west of San Sebastián. Both Subijana and Arzak maintain restaurants in San Sebastián. **Akelarre** *($$$$, Paseo del Padre Orcolaga 56, ☎ 94 321 20 52)* is Pedro Subijana's restaurant, an elegant setting with crisp views of the Cantabrian Sea. Arzak's restaurant is, as you may have guessed, called **Arzark** *(Alto de Miracruz 21, ☎ 94 327 84 65)*. It is a fourth-generation establishment where, as tradition holds, local Donastiarras dine before their weddings. A cheaper alternative but one also run by a big name, chef Martín Berasategi, is **Bodegón Alejandro** *($$$, C/ Fermín Calbetón 4, ☎ 94 342 71 58)* in the Parte Vieja. This is one stop on the locals' nightly *txikiteo*, a custom in which groups bounce from one bar to the next and, between conversation, enjoy glasses of wine. Alejandro serves a delicious seafood stew (*guiso marinero*) and a creamy rice dish with baby squid.

Pintxos

Now to the infamous *pintxos* – the reason País Vasco restaurants are quickly spreading across the country (Barcelona has at least 20). *Pintxos* are a small, bite-sized version of *tapas*, but of a style and artistic flare unique to the region. Each afternoon and night the countertops of *pintxos* bars in the Parte Vieja are lined with plates, each piled with a unique and colorful bite-sized creation, usually atop a slice of bread with a toothpick in the center (bartenders use these to count how many you've had at the end of the night). They range from delectable tiny eels (*angulas*), *tortilla de bacalao* (Spanish omelet with cod), *pimientos rellenos* (mild peppers stuffed with seafood) and a whole range of other choices. You're free to choose; if there isn't a stack of plates already out, politely ask the chef, *"Me das un plato, por favor."* Stack the plate and restack it as many times as you'd like, and don't be afraid to walk the length of the bar eyeing all the offerings. *Pintxos* typically cost 1€ apiece.

To drink like the locals, order a glass of *txakolí* (pronounced: cha-koe-lee). This is a light white wine poured from high overhead so that it acquires a slight sparkle in the glass.

In truth, any of the crowded bars in the Parte Vieja serve dependably good *pintxos* and most have generally the same offerings. If a place looks good, try it. **Casa Tiburcio**, on Calle Fermín Calbetón, is one of the few large bars in the area and as such doesn't get as crowded as some of its competition. It's

bright inside, so if you prefer something a little more cozy try **La Cepa** *($$, 31 de Agosto 9)*, which offers a wide assortment of *pintxos* as well as an affordable *menu del día*. Off by its lonesome in a small plaza next to the Iglesia de Santa María, **La Cueva** *(Plaza de la Trinidad)* has a shaded patio and reasonably priced fish and meat dishes. **Donostiako Sagardotegua Cidreria** *($$, Calle Esterlín)* is a tavern environment with long rows of plank-wood tables shared by cider lovers. During the day **El Mercado de La Bretxa** *(Calle San Juan)* operates as the city's main fish and seafood market, while at night tables are set up for dinner around its exterior in the noisy Plaza Sarriegi.

Going on a local's recommendation, **Juantxo** *(Calle Kalea)* does serve cheap but delicious *bocadillos*. **Gayare** *(Kale Nagusia)* is an affordable self-service cafeteria that, with its stainless steel countertops and swivel-top stools, doesn't look to have changed since the 1950s. A word to the wise; hotdogs take precedence over fine Basque cuisine at this joint.

■ Excursions from San Sebastián

Hondarrabia

This seaside town with a notable French flare (it's just a few minutes from the border) is a popular weekend retreat for Donostiarras. One of its main attractions is the beautiful walled **Casco Viejo**, entered via the Puerta de Santa María. Once inside you'll be thrust onto the Calle Mayor (Cale Nagusia), sided by the *Ayuntamiento*, the Gothic **Iglesia Parroquial** and a host of 17th-century Baroque palaces. At the end is the Plaza de Armas, highlighted by the **Castillo de Carlos V**, now a tourist *parador*. Outside the walls, La Marina is the vibrant fisherman's quarter with bright yellow, red and blue homes and balconies strewn with colorful flowers. Most of the small boutiques, markets and restaurants are localized in this area. From here, the beachside promenade leads to the beach and the entrance of a hike up to the **Castillo de San Telmo** and the **Faro del Cabo Higuer** (lighthouse).

Useful Information

Hondarrabia is 20 km (12 miles) east of San Sebastián; since that city's airport is just outside of Hondarrabia, regional *cerancías* (local commuter) trains and buses link the two at regular intervals throughout the day. The **tourism office** is at *C/ Javier Ugarte 6,* ☎ *94 364 54 58*.

Where to Stay

The **Parador of Hondarrabia**, occupying a 16th-century castle in the walled Casco Viejo, is the finest, if not the most scintillating place to stay in town *(Plaza de Armas 14,* ☎ *94 364 55 00, d 100-115€)*. A cheaper alternative in the old quarter is **Hostal Txoko Goxoa** *(C/ Murrua 22,* ☎ *94 364 46 58).* A double with private bath and television costs 40€ per night.

Zarautz

Two circles on a worn País Vasco map of mine indicate the best surf in the region. One is Mundaka near to Bilbao. The other is Zarautz, a short drive west of San Sebastián on the A-8. While this resort town has a peaceful, historical old quarter (and a kicking nightlife), most of the attention is directed to the

Playa de Zarautz and its waters teeming with rash-guard clad surfers vying for the big break. Zarautz is a two-way beach break with waves big enough to satisfy a pro but manageable enough for a beginner. Peak season is September (when Zarautz hosts an international surfing championship) and October. Once in town, ask around for **Karlos' Surf Shop**; locals will know where it is and there you can rent boards and get the latest scoop on the conditions.

Gran Camping Zarautz *(Monte Talai-Mendi, ☎ 94 383 12 38)* is just off the Zarautz exit of the A-8. If all you plan to do is surf and sleep, the site has sufficient facilities to get you clean and fed during the interim. Adults are charged 3.38€ per night.

While in town, do not miss the opportunity to eat at **Restaurante Karlos Aruiñano**, run by the famed chef of the same name. The restaurant is part of the **Hotel Karlos Arguiñano** *(C/ Medilauta 13, ☎ 94 313 00 00, fax 94 313 34 50)*, which occupies a small palace in the old part of town. Like the food, room prices are up there: 90-115€ per night. **Pensión Txiki Polit** *(Plaza de la Música, s/n, ☎ 94 383 53 57)* should probably be rated as a hostel rather than a pension. Rooms are new, contemporary and outfitted with private bath and television. Doubles range from 35-45€.

Cider Country

You won't need a 4x4 for this trip, just a hearty appetite. In the apple-orchard hills south of San Sebastián, between the small hamlets of Astigarraga and Hernani, cider drinking Spanish-style is as good as it gets. While Asturian cider is more renowned, the País Vasco has a long tradition of cider brewing and a unique way of enjoying it. For a few spring months each season, beginning with the earliest harvest in January, *sagardotegiaks* ((the Euskara, or Basque language equivalent of *sidererías*) open their doors to customers and the cider literally flows free. Seated at long wooden tables in these taverns, diners pay a set price (usually between 15€ and 20€) to feast on a traditional cider-house meal that starts with *tortilla de bacalao* (a cod Spanish omelet), followed by a hearty *chuleton* (t-bone steak) and a desert of walnuts, cheese and *membrillo* (an iridescent orange quince-like jelly). Throughout the meal you're free to help yourself to all the cider you can handle. It's poured in a long stream out of spigots from large wooden casks (*kupelas*) usually ringing the dining room. The stream, known as the *txotx*, is essential to a proper cider pour: it aerates the liquid, which is then drunk in one great swallow. You'll know you've had your money's worth when the waiter shouts *mojón*, which means it's time to uncork a new cask.

Buses run regularly to both Astigarraga and Hernani from San Sebastián. Before leaving, check with one of the tourism shops and pick up a handy listing of each of the *sagardotegiaks*. With your own wheels, head south from San Sebastián through the hills on the GI-131 and watch for the signs, which are frequent after reaching Astigarraga.

Bilbao (Bilbo)

By now the miracle of Bilbao's Renaissance is old news. We have seen pictures of the American architect Frank Gehry's masterpiece, the Guggenheim

Museum, that stunning titanium goliath on the city's Río Nervion. Its bulging curves and layered, sweeping lines call to mind something living rather than static, something sexy, beautiful and by all means seductive. Bilbao was once a grimy industrial and shipbuilding city, one of the few Spanish cities to actually involve itself in the Industrial Revolution which, by and large, passed the rest of Spain by. As recently as the 1980s it had one of the highest pollution rates in Europe. Art patrons, architecture aficionados and curious tourists now flock to Bilbao, not to see its past or even its present, but to envision its future as a promising center of high-culture, one no longer damned by its erstwhile trappings. The locals are the true driving force behind Bilbao's makeover; they, more than anyone, have been seduced by the recently unearthed beauty of their own city.

Bilbao, the capital of the province of Vizcaya (Bizkaia) in western País Vasco, is Spain's fourth largest city, accounting for almost half of the entire population of the País Vasco. The city straddles the Río Nervion in a depression framed by hills a few kilometers from the Bay of Biscay. Since its founding by López de Haro, Lord of Bizkaia, in 1300, Bilbao has been one of Spain's leading industrial cities; early foundries surfeited by nearby iron mines eventually ensured that the city, with access to the sea via a navigable river, would emerge as a major shipping port, a charge it held well into the 20th century. The profitable industry has made Bilbao the leading economic capital of the region, while the recent decline of its traditional industry has allowed the city to shed its old skin and clean up its act.

■ Useful Information

Tourism Offices

Bilbao's main **Oficina de Turismo** occupies a freestanding building on the riverbank next to the Casco Viejo *(Paseo del Arenal 1, ☎ 94 479 57 60)*. Another, smaller office is beside the Museo Guggenheim at Calle Abandoibarra Etorbidea 2.

Adventure Guides

Both **Txof! Buceo Bilbao** *(C/ Luis Briñas 25, ☎ 94 427 77 59, www.lanzadera.com/txof, buceobilbao@euskalnet.net)* and **Nervión Sub** *(C/ Villarías 1, ☎ 94 423 01 08, www.nervionsub.com)* are dive shops in the city. A single dive, usually off the cape of Matxitxako in the Bay of Biscay, costs 30€ at either of the shops. **Ur 2000** *(C/ Viuda de Epalza 10, ☎ 94 479 06 56, www.ur2000.com, info@ur2000.com)* offers a variety of outdoor adventures in the surrounding area, including canyoning, mountain biking, rafting and canoeing. A single rafting or canyoning trip costs 35€ per person.

■ Festivals

Bilbao's **Semana Grande** (*Aste Nagusia* in the Basque language) at the end of the August follows on the heels of a similar celebration in San Sebastián. The clownish figure of Marijaia presides over the festivities – street dances, parades and live music.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: To reach major destinations outside of the País Vasco by train, such as **Madrid** (seven-eight hours) or **Barcelona** (10 hours), head to **RENFE's Estación de Abando del Norte** *(Plaza Circular 2, ☎ 94 423 86 23)*. The station is next to the Puente del

Arenal on the western side of the river. Regional FEVE trains service the cities of Green Spain from the **Estación de Santander** *(C/ Bailén 2, ☎ 94 425 06 33)* next to the RENFE station.

By Bus: Arriving or leaving Bilbao via bus can prove difficult as the city has a number of bus stations, each of which services a particular set of cities. The biggest station is **Termibús** *(C/ Gurtubay 1, ☎ 94 439 52 05)*, located in the western part of the city three blocks south of the river. To reach it, follow the river to Plaza Sagrado Corazón next to the Palacio de Congresos y de La Música, and take Avda Sabino Arana away from the river, making a right on Avda Jus a Zunzunegui. Most of the major cities in the region, including **San Sebastián**, **Pamplona** and **Logroño** are serviced from this station. Buses for more distant destinations, including **Madrid**, **Barcelona**, **Burgos** and **Salamanca**, depart from smaller stations scattered throughout the city. You can check with the attendant at Termibús' information booth for the stops and information on scheduling for any destination.

■ Sightseeing

The modern side of Bilbao, a grid-like set of streets developed during the 19th and 20th centuries and since highlighted by the Museo Guggenheim, extends south from the Río Nervion flowing through town from the fjord-like Ría de Bilbao at the mouth of the Bay of Biscay. **Gran Vía**, the main commercial street and thoroughfare, runs through the heart of this area as far as the Puente del Arenal. Just across this bridge on the far bank is the city's oldest quarter (**Casco Viejo**), hands down the most charming space in the city with numerous *pintxo* bars and traditional cafés. This medieval neighborhood occupies a crook in the river in the eastern part of town and dates to the city's founding in the 14th century. It encompasses the area known as the **Siete Calles**, the original seven streets of the city. On its periphery is the lively **Plaza Nueva**, an arcaded square with a popular Sunday market and, on the opposite side of the neighborhood, the **Iglesia de San Antón**. The 14th-century Gothic **Catedral de Santiago** claims the heart of the Casco Viejo. Since the major sights and entertainment are huddled around the banks of the Río Nervion, a still-developing riverwalk makes touring the city from its historical to its avant-garde spaces an easy task.

For destinations farther afield, catch the **Bilbao Metro** *(☎ 94 425 40 25)*, with stops denoted by three concentric red circles. Two lines connect the city, its outlying neighborhoods and beaches. A single pass costs 1€ and free maps at any of the stops detail the areas covered.

Museo Guggenheim

The silver marvel on Bilbao's riverbank is the brainchild of Frank O. Gehry, an American architect who had previously acquired a reputation as a brazen Los Angeles visionary for creating wild, whimsical and wholly unique spaces out of cheap materials like plywood and corrugated tin. The Guggenheim, with its billowing curves sheathed in an iridescent titanium shell and accented by limestone and high-density UVA-proof glass, was a bold step forward for both the architect and the city of Bilbao. Its undulating design, which incorporates the Ría (or estuary) Nervión and Puente de La Salve in one fluid composition, has been likened to an abstract sea-going vessel, has been criticized for overpowering the art inside, and has begun to tarnish long

before it was expected to. Yet, should it turn the color of rust, admirers would likely laud the change as another step in an evolution the city is grateful to have experienced since the museum's completion in 1997. To earn hosting rights for what would be the Guggenheim Foundation's third major institution, Bilbao had to come up with $100 million US dollars and beat out Paris, London and many other cities with a historically richer artistic tradition.

A towering "Puppy" designed by Jeff Koons and covered with tens of thousands of brightly colored flower stands at the entrance to the museum. Through a breezy atrium you enter the building, with over 11,000 square meters (13,000 square yards) of exhibition space. There are 19 galleries over three levels, each connected by winding walkways and bathed in natural light, warranting almost as much attention as the art it complements. The overall experience is meant to be pro-active, interactive and varied, depending on which unorthodox space you find yourself admiring.

Speak into one end of Richard Serra's *Snake* and your words will be carried over 100 feet to the other end of this undulating iron installation. Along with Jenny Holzer's *Installation for Bilbao*, a tall wall with columns of pulsing LED lights meant to bridge the various levels of the museum, *Snake* is one of the few permanent works in the museum. The revolving exhibitions consist of the Guggenheim Foundation's world-class collection of 20th-century avant-garde art, including works by Willem de Kooning, Vasily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, Paul Klee and countless other contemporary masters. No less impressive is the representation of Spanish artists like of Dalí, Picasso, Eduardo Chillida, Antonio Tàpies and a number of young, up-and-coming Basque artists.

Temporary exhibitions, which have ranged from the evolution of motorcycles to the transparencies of light, are often held in the cavernous Gallery 104 that extends 130 m (426 feet) beneath the Puente de La Salve. Gehry's touch even extended to the post-modern restaurant and ground-floor café. A gift shop and a well-stocked bookstore are dedicated to him and the artists whose avant-garde creations call into question cultural norms, inciting wonder and, in the case of a city like Bilbao, widespread change. *(Avda Abandoibarra 2, ☎ 94 435 90 00, www.Guggenheim-bilbao.es; open daily July-Aug 9 am-9 pm; Sept.-June, Tues.-Sun. 10 am-8 pm; entry 8.40€, 4.20€ for students and seniors; Audio Guide 3.60€; English tours available four times per day Tues.-Sun.)*

Museo de Bellas Artes

If the Guggenheim is brash in appearance and narrow in the scope of its collection, the Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao is just the opposite. The art ranges from early medieval to 17th-century Flemish paintings and the work of Spanish masters of the 18th century school, including the great names of Spain – Zurbarán, Ribera, Velázquez, Goya and El Greco. A modern addition

designed by Luis Uriarte and inaugurated in 2001 has given the space a 21st-century edge that not only draws some deserved attention from the Guggenheim crowd a short way downriver, but also serves to complement its impressive collection of contemporary art from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. A strong emphasis on preeminent Basque artists like sculptors Jorge de Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida is balanced by the Valenciano seascapes of Sorolla and the larger-than-life murals of Tàpies, just one of a number of artists whose world-class works have found their way in both the neighboring silver goliath and this unpretentious but noteworthy museum. *(Plaza de Museo 2, ☎ 94 439 60 60, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-8 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm; entry 3€.)*

Strange Games

Pelota (Pilota) is a traditional Basque game with a growing popularity both in Spain and in foreign countries where small expatriate Spanish communities have spread the rules. Similar to racquetball or handball, pelota is played on a walled court called a *frontones* by two competing teams of one or two players in one of three formats: by hand (what you'll see on many rural courts, often a wall of a local church), with a wooden bat (*cesta-punta*) or with a wicker basket strapped to the hand. This last variant, known as jai-alai, is by far the most popular format as the ball is capable of traveling at mind-boggling speeds (pelota is said to be the fastest ball-sport in the world). While you're almost guaranteed to catch an impromptu game somewhere in the País Vasco, you may be surprised to learn that games in Florida, Mexico and even Asia are not all that uncommon. If you'd like to find out more about this sport, or maybe even start up your own pelota league, contact the **Federación Vasca de Pelota**, ☎ *94 681 81 08.*

Museo Arqueologico, Etnologico y Historico

Dedicated to the history of Basque culture, this museum occupies a 17th-century building in the Casco Viejo near the Plaza Nueva. As its name implies, the collection is an enlightening hodgepodge of prehistoric artifacts, exhibits devoted to the region's traditional fishing and shipping industry with plenty of space for time-honored crafts like weaving and, strangely enough, grass-cutting. The "Mikeldi," an ancient, animalistic stone idol of unknown origins, shown at left, is literally the centerpiece of the museum's collection as it occupies the center of the attractive courtyard. Experts believe that the idol, with symbols of the sun and moon between its legs, was used in pagan rituals by an early Basque civilization. *(C/ Cruz 4, Plaza Miguel de Unamuno, ☎ 94 415 54 23, open Tues.-Sat. 11 am-5 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; entry: 3€.)*

■ Adventures on Wheels

For a bird's-eye view of Bilbao, hitch the funicular to the top of **Mt. Artxanda**, the green hill just northeast of the city's Castaños district. Using the modernistic Puente Zubizuri as a landmark, cross the river from the Guggenheim side, make a left on Paseo Campo de Volantin and take the next right on C/ Múgica y Butrón. Plaza Funicular is two blocks straight ahead. The train, which covers 770 m (2,550 feet) in three minutes, runs every 15 minutes until 10 pm on weekdays and 11 pm on weekends *(El Funicular de Artxanda, Ctra de Artxanda a Santo Domingo 27, ☎ 94 445 49 66; .69€).* You can just as easily walk up the hill from the plaza, though that three-minute rail jaunt will be more like 20 minutes on foot.

■ Adventures on Water

To rest the legs and see Bilbao from a different perspective, consider boarding **El Barco Pil-Pil**, a sightseeing boat that plows the waters of the Ría (or estuary) de Bilbao through the heart of the city. The trip begins and ends at the Paseo de Uribitarte next to the Museo Guggenheim and lasts roughly 50 minutes. The boat departs on the weekends at noon, 1, 5 and 6 pm. The price is 10€ for an adult and 5€ for a child. It is also possible to eat aboard the boat on Friday and Saturday nights. This trip begins at 9:30, lasts roughly four hours and costs 47€ per person *(☎ 94 446 50 65).*

While Bilbao may seem land-locked, a nice string of beaches is just a short trip up the Ría de Bilbao (the river estuary) from the city around the small towns of Getxo and Sopelana. These include the surfer's choice of **Ereaga**, with a typical beach break; **Azkorri**; and the prettiest of the nearest beaches, **Playa de Arrietara**. Farther along the coast, the beaches become markedly cleaner, including **Playa de Salvage** and **Playa de Sopelana**. Both have surfable waves, though the conditions at the latter require some measure of surfing skill. The Metro runs to Getxo, from which the nearest beach is a 10-minute walk away. The beach of Las Arenas, a less than appealing stretch of sand, is near Getxo.

Puente Colgante

Inaugurated in 1888 and credited as the oldest transporter-bridge in the world, Puente Colgante connects Getxo with the town of Portugalete on the western side of the Ría. The bridge, which can accommodate a handful of cars and a load of foot passengers, operates 24 hours per day and, for the low price of .24€ each way, is an entertaining way to experience the high-technology of a bygone era. Another option is to ride the two panoramic elevators to reach the pedestrian way or *pasarela* spanning the river 50 m (164 feet) above it. *La pasarela* is open from 10 am-8 pm and costs 3€ to access.

■ Nightlife

Tip: Once in town, pick up the bi-monthly *Bilbao Guía* at any of the tourism offices, train and bus stations or hotels. This handy guide in Spanish and English covers the gamut of the city's fun side with maps, a calendar of events and listings on art, festivals, shopping, nightlife and dining.

The **Teatro Arriaga** *(Plaza del Arriaga 1, ☎ 94 479 20 36)* is the main venue for theater and dance performances in the city. Depending on the time of your visit, the theater may be hosting ballet, a production of King Lear, a Kiss rock concert or a chamber orchestra.

Bilbao's Symphony Orchestra is at home in the **Palacio Euskalduna** *(C/ Abandoibarra 4, ☎ 94 403 52 05, www.bilbaoorkestra.com)*, a new convention center modeled on the last ship to have left the Euskalduna shipyards. Performances are held on weekends beginning at 8 pm. Another option for live performances is **Kafé Antzokia** *(C/ San Vicente 2, ☎ 94 683 41 41, www.kafeantzokia.com)*, which occupies a theater that has been converted to serve up cultural activities and musical concerts along with plenty of drinks. To kick it up a notch, the area known as **Siete Calles** in the Casco Viejo is the main destination for nightlife, with countless eateries, *pintxo* and cocktail bars and a smattering of clubs.

■ Where to Stay

Petit Palace Arana *(C/ Bidebarrieta 2, ☎ 94 415 64 11, fax 94 416 12 05, petit.palace.arana@hthotels.com, d €85-100)* is a small, modern hotel in the quaint Casco Viejo across from the city's beloved Teatro Arriaga. The entire hotel was remodeled in 2002 and, though the rooms aren't flashy, they are spiffy and some have complimentary Internet connections. You're a few blocks from great restaurants and *pintxo* bars, cocktail bars and the river walk, which leads to sites like the Guggenheim (a 15-minute walk, but not a bad one) and the fine arts museum.

Hotel Iturrienea *(C/ Santa María Kalea 14, ☎ 94 416 15 00, fax 94 415 89 29)* is my choice for the coolest place to stay in Bilbao. It is a classic, old pension that has been kept up through the years. Added to its mix of antique furniture, the decoration uses suave colors and paintings by local artists. Beds are large and best enjoyed in one of the brighter exterior rooms. A double bedroom with private bath costs around 60€ per night.

Hostal Residencia Gurea *(C/ Bidebarrieta 14, ☎ 94 416 32 99)* is the place to stay if you want to be in the heart of the Casco Viejo but don't want to pay the price. There is something likeable about the old place; it's just hard to put a finger on it. Rooms are a tad shabby but clean and go for 32€ with bath.

The nearest campsite is **Camping Sopelana** *(☎ 94 676 21 20, fax 94 676 19 81)*, north of Bilbao on the eastern side of the Ría. In addition to its location on Playa de Sopelana and its numerous facilities, the site has a *fútbol* field and can arrange for horseback riding trips. The regional *cercania* (commuter) trains as well as buses from Bilbao run regularly to this beach. Adults are charged 3.46€ per night.

■ What to Eat & Where

To stock up for a picnic or just gaze upon stall after stall of fresh fruit, veggies, meat and seafood, visit the historical **Mercado de la Ribera** in the Casco Viejo, a prerequisite stop in touring Bilbao. This neat looking old market can't be missed on the riverbank between the Puente de San Antón and the Puente de La Ribera.

Restaurante Bola Viga *($$$, C/ Entrique Eguren 4, ☎ 94 443 50 26)* doesn't have many tables and is usually crowded with locals. *Bacalao* (cod) is the specialty of the house, served grilled, *al pil-pil* (in a garlic olive oil sauce), or fried. Another option is the oxtail stew (*rabo de buey guisado*). Expect to pay around 15€ per plate and make reservations if possible.

Restaurante Guggenheim *($$$$, C/ Abandoibarra Etorbidea 2, ☎ 94 423 93 33)* is an excellent choice, despite what you'd expect from a museum restaurant. Backed by Martín Berasategui (one of the País Vasco's most renowned chefs) and run by Josean Martínez Alija (winner of a recent competition among young Spanish cooks), the restaurant specializes in creative, vanguard cuisine. The menu is frequently changing, though you might expect something along the lines of roast caramel lamb chops or baked cod in a rich garlic white wine sauce. The modern décor falls in line with the striking design of the Guggenheim museum; the chairs were a Gehry touch.

Restaurante Victor *(Plaza Nueva 2-1, ☎ 94 415 16 78)* is one of the pricier restaurants competing for the hungry crowds of the Plaza Nueva in the Casco Viejo. Besides a lengthy wine list, the restaurant serves traditional Basque cuisine. For starters, try the seafood salad or baby squid in garlic sauce. Sirloin medallions are a mainstay on the menu, as is the delicious cappuccino tart for dessert.

La Escuela *(Ctra Enekuri-Artxanda, km 3, ☎ 94 474 52 00)* is a short drive outside of town but worth the trip for a top-notch meal at a bargain price. The restaurant is part of the Artxanda Hospitality Management School, which trains young staff and chefs in the ways of running and tending to hotels and restaurants. While you can go for the tasting menu, with such items as foie gras, braised oxtail or a clam and octopus risotto (25-50€), the restaurant offers a *menu del día* from Mon. through Fri. for 11€.

For *pintxos* (País Vasco's version of *tapas*), try the bars in Plaza Nueva or on Calle Diputación, a short street in front of the Palacio Floral off Gran Vía. **Bar Charly** *($$, Plaza Nueva 8, ☎ 94 415 01 27)* has a healthy sampling including smelt, squid, calamari and *paella*. On C/ Diputación, try **Los Candiles** *($$, C/ Diputación 1, ☎ 94 415 06 14)*, which specializes in seafood *pintxos*, or **Lekeitio** next door *($$, ☎ 94 424 14 79)* for some of the best varieties of tortilla that are arguably the tastiest in town.

Cafés

While Bilbao makes strides to erase the dirtier aspects of its past, a few classic cafés survive as a reminder that the once mighty industrial city was not all steel and sweat, that it did have style and ambiance long before a man named Gehry entered it. Since the early 20th century the **Iruña Café** *(Jardines de Albia)* has been an enclave for writers and intellectuals. Its Mudéjar décor of bright blue and yellow tiles is reminiscent of the Moorish styling found more commonly in southern Spain. **La Granja** *(Plaza Circular 3)* was established around the same time as Iruña, but has a decidedly

lower-key atmosphere. An affordable *menu del día* is offered and coffee is always available. Another hub of Bilbao's artist set is **El Café Boulevard** *(Paseo del Arenal 3)*, an art-deco café that first opened its doors in 1871. Its **El Rincón de Chocolate** sells unique chocolate-infused pastries (try the orange chocolate) and dishes out steaming cups of thick chocolate syrup for *churros* dipping. While not as historical, **La Barmacia** *(C/ Villarías 5, ☎ 94 424 45 10)* mimics these classy establishments with elegant gold crown work, horseshoe archways and shiny marble countertops. The café serves a light breakfast with coffee and fresh orange juice, afternoon *pintxos* and evening cocktails and imported beer until 1:30 am on weekdays and 3:30 am on Fridays and Saturdays.

■ Excursions from Bilbao

Gernika (Guernica)

A few locals can still recall the terrifying day of April 26, 1937 when Hitler's flight squadron "Condor Legion" began its methodical bombing of the town at the behest of General Franco. By the end of the day the city had been all but destroyed and over 2,000 people lay dead, killed by either the aerial bombs or machine gunners, whose job it was to gun down any fleeing civilians. The horrifying reality of that day was captured in Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica*, now housed in Madrid's Museo de Reina Sofía. Picasso, who had fled the country during Franco's reign, requested that the painting, which had resided in New York for years, be returned to his homeland once democracy was restored.

Useful Information

Gernika's **Oficina de Turismo** is on C/ Atekalea 8 off the main Calle Adolfo Urioste. To reach Gernika from Bilbao, catch the green line (direction Bermeo) of the **EuskoTren** *(☎ 90 254 32 10, www.euskotren.es)*. With your own wheels, take the N-634 east from the city and at Amorebieta-Echano turn north on the BI-635.

Sightseeing

Not surprisingly, there isn't all that much to see in the town of Gernika, though you'll want to visit the 300-year-old oak tree, **El Arbol**, a proud symbol of freedom beneath which the Vizkaian government met until 1876. It stands in the yard of the Casa de Juntas del Señorío de Vizcaya, the former meeting place of the Basque General Assembly; both were miraculously unharmed during the aerial bombardment. The town's **Parque de la Paz** has two noteworthy sculptures, one by Henry Moore and the other, the Gure Aitaren Etxea (Our Father's House) by Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, commissioned on the 50th anniversary of the town's bombing.

Adventures on Foot

Near Gernika, the **Cueva de Santimamiñe** is a fantastical underground cavern full of stalactites, stalagmites and prehistoric paintings over 12,000 years old. Though you won't need potholing equipment since the cave is only accessible via guided tours, it is a

worthwhile excursion from Gernika or Bilbao if dank spaces and ancestral visions strike your fancy. Five tours are made each day, the earliest beginning around 10 am and the last at 6 pm. From Gernika take the BI-638 in the direction of Lekeitio, following the estuary to Kortezubi, where a signpost points to the Cueva de Santimamiñe, accessed via the BI-4244.

Mundaka

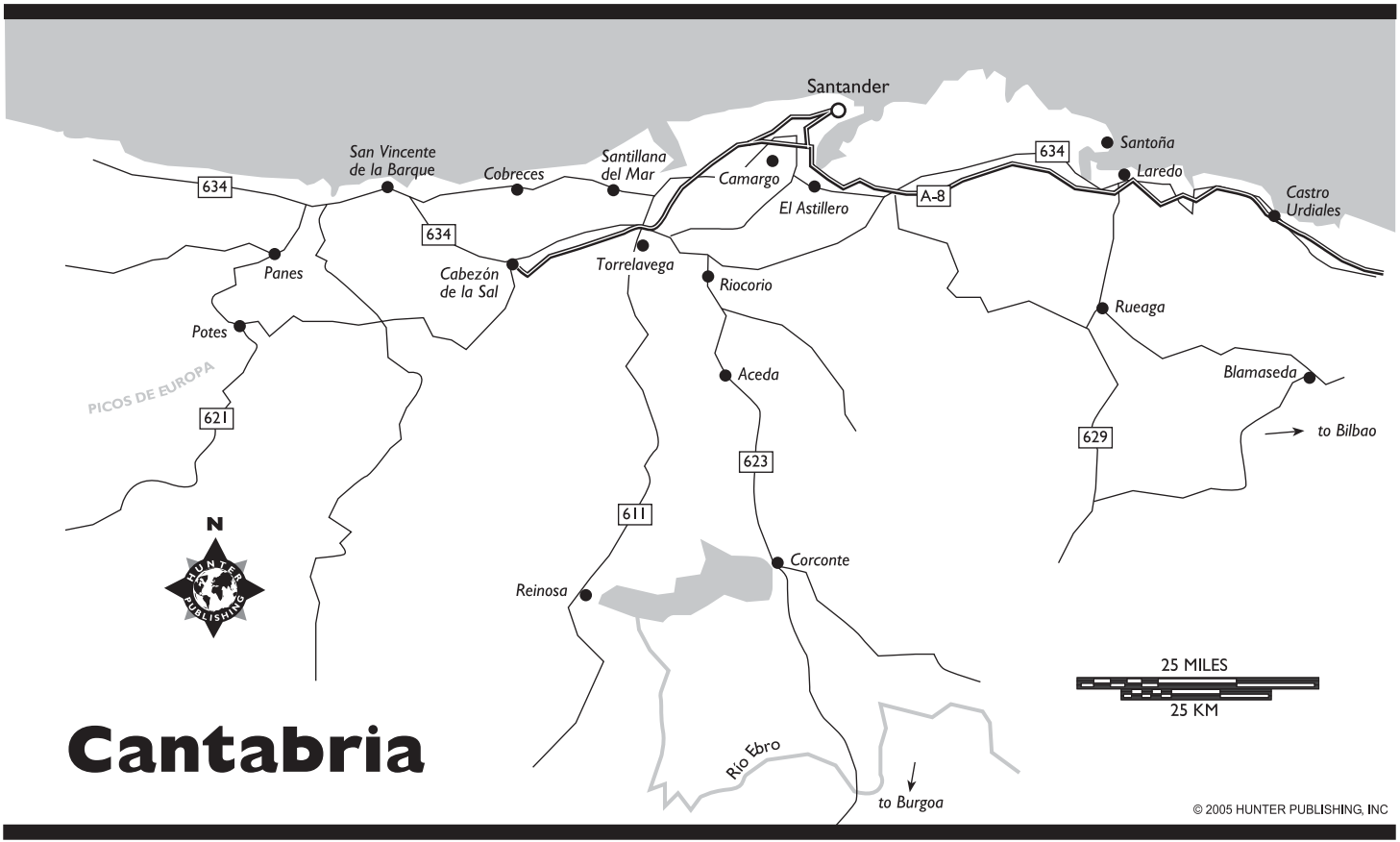
Useful Information

From Bilbao, catch the green line of the regional EuskoTren, part of the Ferrocarriles de Cercanías *(☎ 90 254 32 10)*. Mundaka is the second-to-last stop before Bermeo. If you have a car, take the BI-631 northeast from Bilbao as far as Bermeo on the coast, then follow the BI-635 a few kilometers south along the Ría (or estuary) to Mundaka.

Adventures on Water

Ask a Basque where the best surfing conditions are in the region and you'll be directed to Mundaka, a small fishing port east of Bilbao on the western bank of the Gernika estuary (Ría de Mundaka). The mammoth left break is tagged as one of the longest in the world; some even say it's in the same league as Costa Rica's Pavones. Conditions are best in September (when the town plays host to an international surfing competition) and October, though you'll be able to catch a decent break year-round. A less challenging surf is the beach break of **Playa Laida** across the Ría.

There are a number of surf shops in Mundaka as well as a campsite that rents boards and keeps tabs on the conditions: **Camping Portuondo** *(☎ 94 687 77 01, www.campingportuando.com)* is south of Mundaka on the only *carretera* running along the estuary, or Ría de Mundaka.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Cantabria

Cantabria is similar to neighboring Asturias in terms of geography. Both share the Cantabrian Mountain Range, its Picos de Europa National Park and the coastline of the Cantabrian Sea. Both have also been historically isolated and neither were permanently infiltrated by the Moors. Their seafaring traditions are also similar – witness the food, the boats and the prerequisite smells. But where Asturias is immensely proud of its Visigothic and Pre-Romanesque architecture, Cantabria is endowed with a rich prehistory as shown in the greatest network of caves found in Spain, the most famous of which is the Cueva de Altamira with its vivid polychrome paintings over 14,000 years old. Nor is the Celtic tradition as strong here as it is in Asturias and, to a greater extent, Galicia.

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In the east, Cantabria borders the culturally stoic País Vasco, whose culinary tendencies and even language occasionally filter across the border. South of Cantabría, across the vast mountain range where the mighty Ebro River originates, the dry, mostly flat region of Castilla y León is wholly different in terms of culture and landscape – some might say it is more *Spanish*. Yet for a diminutive province nestled in a rainy and cold region that sees fewer visitors and exhibits less of the traditional stereotypes we've come to expect of Spain, one can't help but appreciate Cantabria for its differences.

Santander

Reputed as the Marbella of the Atlantic Coast, Cantabria's capital of Santander is well known as a leader in the Spanish banking industry. Despite a history of freak catastrophes – each of which either destroyed its neighborhoods and monuments and/or killed lots of its people – Santander has emerged as a posh retreat for the illustrious and the wealthy. From its ports anchored with their luxury cruisers and sailboats, to its beaches spanning the "in" area of El Sardinero, to the mix of the natural and palatial spaces on the Península de la Magdalena, *their* world is clean, high-spirited, fun-loving and apart from the rest of the city.

■ History

Historic Santander has endured a succession of problems. Those began in 1497 on the heels of two centuries in which the city had profited as a leading port in the wool trade with Flanders. In that year Santander hosted the marriage of Don Juan, the crown prince of the Catholic Kings, to Margarita of Austria; the bride-to-be had arrived with a large escort of soldiers, servants and, unwittingly, the plague, which exacted a considerable toll on the city's population. A century later, riches from the New World began to improve the city's outlook and by the 19th century Santander had come on strong as an innovator in the Spanish banking industry, a role it still holds in the 21st century.

On a bleak day at the end of the 19th century Spanish newspaper headlines read: "Freighter Explodes in Santander Port, Over 100,000 Killed." In addi-

tion to the startling death toll, the old town, which had grown up around the ill-fated port, was badly damaged as fires swept the city following the explosion. When the flames had died down a new fire station was quickly built in a show of perseverance and soon thereafter King Alfonso XIII established Santander as the summer retreat of Spanish Royalty; the well-healed followed and continue to do so.

In 1941 another fire raged in the city, devouring most of what the previous one hadn't. That the city had avoided the devastating effects of the Civil War a few years earlier was small consolation. Santander, arguably Spain's most determined city, emerged from the ashes in the ensuing decades to take up its place alongside the País Vasco's San Sebastián as one of the two favored resort cities on Spain's Atlantic Coast. Despite pockets of grime and noisiness, Santander looks sleek and modern and – if the lack of old-world architecture is any indicator – braced for the future. The good times roll and the fire station still stands in case the past repeats itself.

■ Useful Information

Tourism Offices

The main **Oficina de Turismo** *(☎ 94 220 30 00)* is in the Jardines de Pereda on the bay, a five-minute walk east from the bus and train stations. In summers there are three free walking tours: Monumental Santander (12:15 pm, 5:15 pm and 7 pm) and Maritime Santander (10:45 am, 4 pm) depart from the tourism office in the Pereda Gardens. The other tour of Santander and its beaches (12:15 and 7 pm) departs from the tourist office in El Sardinero.

■ Adventure Guides

TMC Sailtur *(Plaza Esperanza 3, ☎ 94 221 39 89, www.sailtur.com, sailtur@ceoecant.es)* is a multi-adventure company specializing in water activities. This includes providing guides and equipment for scuba diving, fishing, boating and sailing around Santander. The **Centro de Buceo Godofredo** *(Paseo Pareda 31, ☎ 94 221 57 51, www.godofredobuceo.com)* is the main dive shop in town, offering dives, equipment and certification courses.

■ Festivals

Each year in August Santander plays host to the immensely popular **Festival Internacional de Santander**, a music (jazz, classical, flamenco, you name it) and dance festival that takes place in and around Plaza Porticada. At the end of July the **Semana Grande** is a week-long excuse to get inebriated and dance in the streets until the sun comes up.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: Santander is serviced by **RENFE** and slower **FEVE** trains, the stations for which are together on Plaza de las Estaciones. RENFE handles major city destinations on a daily basis, including **Madrid** (six hours) and **Valladolid** (five hours). Connections to other cities are usually routed through one of these cities. The regional FEVE trains run to areas in **Cantabria**, **País Vasco** and **Asturias**.

By Bus: The **Estación de Autobuses** *(☎ 94 221 19 95)* is next to the train station on the corner of Calle Navas de Tolosa and Calderón de la Barca. Both are off Calle Rodríguez two blocks north of the Calle Antonio López, running along the Bahía de Santander as far as the Jardines de Pereda. Daily buses run to the cities of Green Spain (**Galicia**, **Asturias**, **Cantabria** and **País Vasco**), as well as **León**, **Burgos**, **Salamanca**, **Madrid** and **Barcelona**.

By Boat: **Brittany Ferries** *(Estación Maritima, s/n, ☎ 94 236 06 11)* operates a ferry twice weekly between Santander and Plymouth, England. The trip can take up to 24 hours and tends to fill up in the summer, so book well in advance. To see the surrounding area and visit some nearby beaches by water, **Los Reginas** *(Paseo Marítimo, ☎ 94 221 67 53, www.losreginas.es, info@losreginas.es)* runs the boats. Destinations include **Pedreña** and **Somo**, as well as **Playa del Puntal** and **Ría de Cubas**.

By Car: If you're traveling by car, the N-634 runs along the northern Atlantic Coast, with Bilbao and San Sebastián east of Santander and Gijón, Oviedo and the region of Galicia accessible to the west. To reach Madrid you'll have to take the N-623 south through Burgos to pick up the N-I.

■ Sightseeing

Santander is a narrow city running lengthwise along the Bahía de Santander to the Mar Cantábrico, which is separated from the bay by the Península de La Magdalena. The few sights in the bay area constitute the city's oldest surviving buildings. Situated in the vicinity of the Jardines de Pereda and the nearby Plazas de Pombo and Porticada, these generally date to the turn of the 20th century or later and include the **Banco de Santander**, the **Real Club de Regatas** and the **Correos** and ***Ayuntamiento***. The one exception is the Catedral, though divine intervention has not spared it from the necessity of repairing the ravages of fire and time. This area is the commercial and social hub of the city, nearest the train and bus stations, the tourism offices and countless *tapas* bars.

From Puerto Chico the Avenida de la Reina Victoria runs past the bayside beaches to the Península and Royal Palace, then turns north to skirt the Cantábrico beaches of El Sardinero. Buses 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 run from the city center along this route regularly throughout the day if the 20-minute walk isn't appealing. The fancy homes of El Sardinero front a large, sandy swath that is the locus of the summertime action; while not dead during the rest of the year, things do slow down and, in cases, close down during the colder months. It stretches as far as the Cabo Menor, home to the large Parque de Mataleñas and the city zoo, beyond which is the small Playa de Mataleñas, nestled in a rocky cove.

Santander's oldest surviving monument, the Gothic **Catedral** dates to the 13th century, though much of what is visible today was built in the 1950s after the 1941 fire had all but stripped, gutted and partially leveled it. The Catedral is neither visually impressionable nor boorish. It is utilitarian in scope and curious in design, as it is in fact two churches, the latest built atop the earliest and both sharing the same ground plan.

In the northern nave of the lower crypt known as the Iglesia del Cristo, a glass floor reveals the excavations of a Roman settlement built on this hillock after the Romans had conquered the region around 25 BC, during the reign of

Augustus. Silver reliquaries encase the skulls of two Roman soldiers, Celedonius and Emetherius, martyred around the year 300 and thereafter delivered to the site, which hastened the construction of the earliest monastery and invited numerous pilgrimages.

The high church, surrounded by 17th-century chapels, was reopened in 1953 after extensive remodeling and additions that included a new ambulatory, transept and dome. It was rebuilt in the Gothic style with certain classical motifs added to set it apart from that which remains of the original church. Of the interior, chapel relics that were hurriedly spirited away before the fire, as well as one altarpiece, remain from the original holdings. Lying among saints, the tomb of the revered Sananderine writer Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo occupies a space near the northern nave. A marble stone next to the sacristy door bearing a poetic Arabic inscription is said to have been taken from Sevilla by Cantabrian sailors who participated in that city's Reconquest from the Moors. With it they returned to Santander, capital of a region that had never fallen into the hands of the Moorish invaders. *(Open 10 am-1 pm and 4-7:30 pm; Iglesia del Cristo 8 am-1 pm and 5-8 pm; free entry.)*

The **Palacio Real de la Magdalena**, at the highest point of the Magdalena Peninsula, is surrounded by green, tree-shaded grounds and modest seaside cliffs. It was inaugurated in 1913 as the summer residence of King Alfonso XIII. The English-styled manor would serve its royal role for the next 20 years until Franco took control of the country. It now serves a less distinguished though far more beneficial function as home to the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo. The palace setting affords a great view of El Sardinero as well as the other beaches and small islands surrounding the peninsula. Three galleons are moored on the Cantabrian Sea side, a gift to the city from the native mariner Vital Alsar. They last set sail in the 1990s to recreate Orellana's expedition across the Pacific Ocean. Nearer to El Sardinero, a Mini-Zoo is dedicated to sea animals and the children who love them.

From Plaza Porticada, site of Santander's annual festival of music and dance, the shoppers' street of Juan de Herrera runs to the 20th-century *Ayuntamiento* or town hall, with its subtle Modernist style. Next to it is the **Plaza de la Esperanza**, a busy fish market, the **Casa-Museo-Librería Menéndez Pelayo** devoted to the city's illustrious writer and the region's **Museo de Bellas Artes** *(Fine Arts Museum, C/ Rubio 6, ☎ 94 223 94 85; summers Mon.-Fri. 10:30 am-1 pm and 5:30-8 pm, Sat. 10:30 am-1 pm; winters 10:30 am-1 pm and 5:30-7 pm, Sat. 10:30 am-noon).* In the opposite direction, approaching the area around the former fishing port turned marina of Puertochico, is the **Museo de Prehistoria y Arqueología** *(Prehistoric & Archeological Museum, C/ Casimiro Sainz 4, ☎ 94 220 71 09; summers Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; winters Tues.-Sat. 9 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 9 am-2 pm)* and the **Museo Marítimo de Cantabria** (*Maritime Museum, C/ San Martín de Bejamar, ☎ 94 227 49 62, summers Tues.-Sat. 11 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm; winters Tues.-Sat. 11 am-1 pm and 4-6 pm, Sun. 11 am-1 pm).*

Santander is endowed with a number of large parks, the main ones being the **Parque de la Magdalena** on the peninsula of the same name and the city's largest, the **Parque de Mataleñas**. The latter is situated immediately north of the El Sardinero district beaches.

■ Adventures on Water

Beaches

Santander's nearest sandy abodes are grouped according to three areas. The first set of beaches spans the bay alongside the Península de la Magdalena. These include **Playas de los Peligros**, **de la Magdalena** and **de Biquinis** and are slightly rockier than the fine sand of **El Sardinero**. Though closer to the city, clean and pretty, they tend to be less crowded than those on the opposite side of the peninsula. The sheltering effect of the bay means the water is more predictable and families with small children more prevalent. Mind the younger fishermen on these beaches – those who cast a long sweep of line from the sandy beach haphazardly, without first having looked around to see if they might be catching a human rather than a herring.

Past the peninsula on the seaside are the beaches of the ritzy area known as El Sardinero, where the deep-pocketed unlock their coastal chalets for three months of deep-frying. The man-made **Playa del Camello** at the foot of the peninsula is the first of these beaches, so-called for the camel-shaped rock in the water just off it. The immensely popular and immaculately clean **Playas de La Concha** and **Primera** continue the stretch as far as **Plaza de Italia**, the social hub of the area, where people come to be seen and flash heavy clips of green at the terrace restaurants. The **Gran Casino** typifies the Belle Époque styling of this posh area.

Playa de Segunda is separated at high tide from Playa de Primera by the Jardines de Piquío. Look for the best waves around this spot. The less-crowded **Playa de Molinucos** runs as far as Cabo Menor, a rocky protuberance on the far side of which is secluded little **Playa de Mataleñas**; this beach is rarely bothered with by tourists (most don't realize it exists) and preferred by swimsuit-phobic locals. A 19th-century lighthouse tops Cabo Mayor at the far end.

From the city center, it's a 20-minute walk to the first set of beaches and five more to reach the sea beaches, with rougher water (waves), more people (but more room) and action (even when it's raining). On foot you can follow Avenida de La Reina Victoria, which begins at Puerto Chico and runs past the peninsula as far as Plaza Sardinero Azul off Playa de la Concha. Otherwise, catch bus 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, or 9 from the *Ayuntamiento* or at one of the stops along Avenida de la Reina Victoria. These buses run to the action-packed Plaza de Italia as well as the Jardines de Piquío.

Boat Tours

Leisurely boat tours of the Bahía de Santander are run by **Los Reginas** *(Paseo Marítimo, ☎ 94 221 67 53, www.losreginas.es)*. Their ticket office is next to the main tourism office, with launches from the Embarcadero Lanchas next to the Jardines de Pereda. If, in your wondering along the bay, you've noticed the nice sandy spots just across the water and wondered how to get there, Los Reginas is also the answer. During the summer, a ferry runs every 30 minutes to these, the beaches of **Puntal**, **Somo** and **Pedreña** (2.55€). The bay tour, which lasts around an hour, costs 3€.

Surfing

Across the channel in the pueblo de Somo, **Escuela Cántabra de Surf** *(Paseo Marítimo de Somo, ☎ 94 237 35 73, www.navegalia.com / personalsurf, ecsurf@navegalia.com)* offers surfing classes and board rentals. Classes are held in the modest but dependable surf off the Playa de Somo, a six-km (3.7-mile) beach visible from the Santander side of the bay and reached either by car or via one of the ferries departing the Estación Marítimo Los Reginas. A five-day surfing course from Mon.-Fri. costs 85€. While it is no problem to catch the ferry to Somo each morning, you may want to consider staying in one of the hostels near the school. The instructors can help arrange accommodations. Surf and body boards are rented for 42€ per weekend. If you'd rather stay on the Santander side of things, surf shops abound in El Sardinero, where the staunchest waves are just off Playas de Primera and Segunda. Besides offering lessons, the **Escuela de Surf Santander** *(Barrio La Luz 6, ☎ 62 793 34 97)* rents surf and body boards in this area.

■ Nightlife

With so much money being tossed around in the El Sardinero district, it's little wonder the **Gran Casino** *(Plaza de Italia)* is one of Santander's prime entertainment venues. Beneath the crystal and bright lights inside you'll find all the regular games, including blackjack, roulette and craps. And as with any of Spain's casinos, you'll need a passport to gamble and should dress formally.

In the summer, the nightlife around El Sardinero is popular for its beach bars and beach parties. While crime isn't a major issue, do mind your possessions on the beach at night. Throughout the year, the bars and clubs in the area around **Plaza Cañadio** in the city center are dependably crowded and rowdy. This *marcha* (party) scene is concentrated north of Paseo de Pereda running along the bay and west of Calle Casimiro Sainz.

■ Where to Stay

While pricier, the accommodations in the area of El Sardinero are preferable to those in the city center, particularly in the summer. El Sardinero is the clean and fancy resort area, while El Centro is far from the beaches, noisy and a touch filthy.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

☆☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Real** *(Paseo Pérez Galdós 28, ☎ 94 227 25 50, fax 94 227 45 73, www.realsantander.husa.es; d 135€ in winter, 220€ in high-season)* dates from the early 20th century when Santander was refashioning itself as the royal summer residence of King Alfonso XIII. The gleaming white palace is classically appointed and emblematic of the Belle Époque styling favored during the period. Rooms have private balconies with views of the bay, the Península de la Magdalena and the beaches on both sides.

Nearer to the beaches of El Sardinero (in fact, just across the street from them) is the ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Rhin** *(Avda Reina Victoria 153, ☎ 94 227 43 00,*

fax 94 227 86 53, www.gruporhin.com, d 85-100€) and the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Victoria** *(C/ María Luisa Pelayo 38, ☎ 94 229 11 00, fax 94 229 11 01, d 56-94€).*

Cheaper still and on the beach is the **Hostal Carlos III** *(Avda Reina Victoria 135, ☎ 94 227 16 16)*. Each of the rooms in this 100-year-old mansion is distinctly styled, with views of the Cantabrian Sea and full bathrooms. A double costs 45-60€.

In the city center, the fancy ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Bahía** *(C/ Alfonso XIII 6, ☎ 94 220 50 00, fax 94 220 50 01, www.gruposardinero.com)* overlooks the bay next to the Jardines de Pereda. Rooms in this expansive hotel range from 112-148€ depending on the season.

Pension Plaza *(C/ Cádiz 13, ☎ 94 221 29 67, www.pension-plaza.com, pensionplaza@terra.es)* is centrally located between the bus and train stations and the Jardines de Pereda on the bay but, because of the noise, dirtiness and distance to the beaches, most people prefer to stay away from this area. Save for this hostel, most of the others in the area are run-down. Here, rooms were recently remodeled and modernized with full baths, television and cheery colors. Some of the interior rooms are small and claustrophobic, but the lack of cracks and cockroaches more than makes up for it.

If you've come to Santander for the sport of it, consider staying at the **Club Náutico La Horadada** *(C/ Reina Victoria, s/n, ☎ 94 228 04 02, lahoradada@terra.es)* on Playa La Magdalena. The square chalet rents rooms with space for six to eight people and organizes activities, including sailing, windsurfing, diving and canoeing.

■ What to Eat & Where

Seafood is not surprisingly a culinary staple in Santander. If near the city center and hungry for such, the **Barrio Pesquero** is the place to head. This old fisherman's wharf may not appear as cool as it sounds, but the reasonable prices (in comparison to El Sardinero) and the fresh quality ensure its tasty appeal. The neighborhood is sandwiched between the bay and the Puerto Pesquero southwest of the Jardines de Pereda. A walk down the barrio's **Calle Marqués de la Ensenada** passes one seafood joint after another, most of which offer a *menu del día* for 12€ or less, as do **La Cueva** *($-$$, ☎ 94 236 27 06)* and **Casa José** *($-$$, ☎ 94 22 20 09)*. The food comes directly from the water via Plaza de la Esperanza, a busy marketplace selling fresh Cantabrian fish and seafood in the city center.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

The renovated market building east of Plaza Cuadro on Paseo de Pereda is packed with *bodegas* and *tapas* bars. A few blocks north, **Cañadio** *($$$, Gómez Oreña 15, ☎ 94 231 41 49)* is a locals restaurant and well-known *tapas* bar. House specialties include hake (*merluza*) cooked in an assortment of ways and baby squid (*chipirones*). In the same area, **Bodega La Cigaleña** *($$, C/ Daoíz yVelarde 19, ☎ 94 221 30 62)* is the undisputed king of wine in Santander. Fine bottles representing every region in Spain can be had at reasonable prices, along with an assortment of *raciones*.

In El Sardinero, **Plaza de Italia** is the liveliest area to chow down; numerous restaurants with terrace seating crowd the periphery. Commanding attention is the extravagant **Restaurante Gran Casino del Sardinero** *($$$$, Plaza de Italia, s/n, ☎ 94 203 05 50)*, occupying part of the casino with two terraces and beach views. A specialty of the area and available at this restaurant is *maganos*, cuttlefish prepared in its own ink. Along with its seafood dishes the restaurant serves a sirloin steak doused in fig sauce with crème of cheese and potatoes. A slightly less showy dining experience can be had at **La Costera** *($$$$, Avda Reina Victoria 46, ☎ 94 228 06 11)*, which offers sea views and a menu that isn't restricted to seafood. Though cod (*bacalao*) is a main ingredient here (try the salad with it, sweet peppers and avocado), game dishes also are enticing, such as the quail stuffed with foie-gras in a grape sauce. A happy ending is the belt-busting chocolate truffle with a pistachio cream sauce.

Excursions from Santander

■ San Vicente de la Barquera

Near Cantabria's western border with Asturias on the coast is San Vicente, a fanciful walled fishing village situated on the small estuary of San Vicente with the snow-capped mountains of the Picos de Europa looming in the distance. During the 19th century the village enjoyed the honor of serving as the summer residence of the Spanish court. The transcendental **Barrio Pesquera** dates from a much earlier era with the ruins of a 15th-century **Castillo** overlooking it and the town's Puerta de Poniente. Next to it, the 13th-century Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María de los Ángeles**, above, is the oldest surviving monument in the village, though numerous restorations can be dated to later periods. Along with its burgeoning tourism industry, fishing has long been the prime industry in San Vicente and in the neighboring villages of the area, to which the former serves as a gateway if arriving from Santander. As early as the 13th century the town claimed a government monopoly on fishing rights to the Río Deva (which explicitly excluded neighboring Unquera), one of the two trout and salmon rivers that have long served to bolster the seafood fishing industry. The other, the Río Nansa, flows through the fjord-like estuary, Ría de Tina Menor before draining into the sea. Now, Unquera has acquired a reputation and industry of its own, with countless water-rats flocking to its river bearing canoes and kayaks.

Useful Information

San Vicente de la Barquera is roughly 50 km (31 miles) west of Santander on the N-634. Daily **La Cantábrica buses** *(☎ 94 272 08 22)* run from the provincial capital to San Vicente's Estación de Autobuses on Avda de Miramar. The **Oficina de Turismo** of San Vicente is at Avda del Generalísimo 20, ☎ *94 271 07 97*.

Adventure Guides

Multiaventurea San Vicente *(C/ Fuente Nueva 2, ☎ 66 639 65 64, www.multiaventura.cjb.net)* is the main company in town for active sports. Choices include bungee jumping, canyoning, canoeing, rock climbing, paragliding, hiking, rafting and so on, until we're all completely exhausted. It's best to make arrangements by calling ahead or stopping by at least the night before to find out the scheduling.

Adventures on Water

Rowing

Each year on the last Sunday in August, while the villages celebrate their patron saint, competitive rowers race the Río Deva from Panes to Unquera. Throughout the year canoes can be rented in either of these two main villages along the river. **Devatur** *(Estación de Unquera, ☎ 94 271 70 33, fax 94 271 70 13, www.Netcom.es/cantu)* rents canoes in Unquera at 21€ for three hours.

Beaches & Surfing

Cross the ría or estuary from San Vicente to reach its two main beaches, **Playa de San Vicente** and, east of it, **Playa de Merón**. Both are prized among locals and tourists alike for their cleanliness and setting the green ría or estuary merges with the blue sea. While families frequent both of the beaches, surfers make for Merón, where the beach break can throw up sizable swells. An average surfer shouldn't be discouraged from it or from **Playa de Oyambre**, the next beach to the east, also with a decent beach break.

Where to Stay

The ☆☆☆ **Hotel Miramar** *(Puerto de la Barquera 20, ☎ 94 271 00 75)* offers modern amenities with rooms overlooking the bay and the mountains of the Picos de Europa. A double costs 60-70€. **Hotel Noray** *(Paseo de la Barquera, s/n, ☎ 94 271 21 41)* has modest accommodations with private bath, television and views of the bay. Doubles range from 35-55€ depending on the season. **Pension La Barquera** *(Paseo de la Barquera, ☎ 94 271 00 75)* has 14 sparse rooms and is within walking distance of the castle, should you be interested, and the oldest neighborhood. A double costs 35€.

Camping Playa de Oyambre *(☎ 94 271 14 61, fax 94 271 15 30, www.oyambre.com, oyambre@ctv.es)* is east of San Vicente off the N-634 Santander-Oviedo carretera, km 265. The 600-capacity campground has full facilities, including a restaurant, market, showers, swimming pool, cabanas, mail and gas and electrical hook-ups. A *parcela* costs 6.95€, which includes the price for a car and tent. Individuals are charged 3.45€ per night.

Where to Eat

Restaurante Augusto *($$$, C/ Mercado 1, ☎ 94 271 20 40)* is the type of place one hopes to find but rarely does, with a friendly staff serving quality seafood in an antique tavern. Try the *sorropotún*, a variety of fish stew unique to the area.

■ Santillana del Mar

Notwithstanding the implications for historians and archeologists, the discovery of the Altamira cave in the late 19th century and the subsequent spread of its renown has cast Santillana del Mar, the town nearest the site, into the tourism spotlight. Santillana, nestled in a depression banked by rolling hills a short jaunt inland from the sea, spans the centuries since its founding by Benedictine monks in the ninth century with a harmonious and, some might say pompous, blend of architecture encompassing palaces, mansions, convents, towers and a beautiful church. Cobblestone pathways wind between these stately buildings.

Useful Information

Santilla del Mar is 25 km (15 miles) west of Santander. Four buses per day (seven in July and Aug.) run by **Autobuses la Cantábrica** *(☎ 94 272 08 22)* connect the two locales. Santilla's **Oficina de Turismo** is on Calle Jesús Otero 20, ☎ 94 281 82 51.

Sightseeing

The pride of the village is the Romanesque **Iglesia de la Colegiata de Santa Juliana**, right, founded by Augustinian monks in the 12th century during a period of relative splendor as pilgrims en route to Santiago de Compostela passed through the town to pay their respects to the relics of Saint Juliana. The largest church on the Bay of Biscay, it bears the relics of the city's namesake in a sepulcher at the center of its transept; she was martyred in the third century for refusing to renounce her Christianity and surrender her virginity during Roman persecutions. Her remains were brought to Santillana with the earliest arriving monks. The church's vine-strewn cloister is a wondrous space adorned with Norman and Arabic geometrical patterns and mythical beasts along its Romanesque arcade.

From the Plaza de Las Arenas in front of the church, a walk down Calle del Río and then Calle del Cantón passes by countless palatial homes ranging in style from the Renaissance to the Baroque favored by the privileged families of the 17th century. One street over, Plaza Ramón Pelayo is highlighted by two Gothic towers, the *Ayuntamiento* or town hall and yet more palaces. While many are closed to tourists, others have been revamped as hotels or exhibition spaces. Regardless, the main pleasure of strolling down the streets of Santillana is to read the various coats of arms adorning them, each with an interesting if not profound statement of virtue, faith or downright petulant observation.

Adventures on Foot

Described as the Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic art, the **Altamira Cave** is Spain's most notable prehistoric site and, as such, its most guarded. Since its discovery two km (1.2 mile) outside of Santilla in 1879 by Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola and his daughter María, the authenticity of the artwork has come under repeated scrutiny. How, some scholars have wondered, could such a primitive human being create such elegant and exacting representations of life on a dark wall with scant resources? A more pressing concern is the growing threat of degradation from too many visitors, which can create damaging fluctuations in heat and humidity. The Altamira cave is truly one of a kind, a natural, stone, cream-colored rock surface that served as a palette for a single anonymous artist whose polychromatic renditions of bison, deer, bulls and wild boar have withstood the rigors of 14,000 years.

Though the cave is roughly 270 m (885 feet) long, the bulk of its masterpiece was carved, painted and scraped onto the walls (the natural contours of which were used to great visual effect by the artist) of what is now known as the Sala de Polícromos (Polychrome Hall). A natural subsurface corridor snakes past this main hall, which is near the entrance of the cave, and burrows deeper and deeper into the earth, past abstract designs, carved and painted deer, bison, horses and goats and, at its very end, curious painted figures.

Having been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, entrance to the cave is strictly limited to 8,500 visitors per year, most of whom earn the privilege because they have previously earned degrees in related sciences. To actually enter the cave, you'll need to apply more than a year in advance, in writing. A trip to the cave, however, is far from disappointing as a new research center and museum has been constructed near the entrance along with an exact replica of the polychromatic hall (and this one you can enter). In addition to its exhibits on Altamira, the museum is touted as the most extensive prehistoric center in Europe, with replicas of art and authentic relics found throughout the country's caves. *(Museo de Altamira, 39330 Santillana del Mar, Cantabria; information ☎ 94 281 80 05, fax 94 284 01 57, www.mcu.es/nmuseos/altamira, altamira@museo.mec.es; open Mon.-Sat. June-Sept. 9:30 am-7:30 pm, Oct.-May 9:30 am-5 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-5 pm; entry 2.40€.)*

Where to Stay

One of the joys of Santillana is the ability to stay in a medieval accommodation at any price level. The upper-echelon includes the **Parador Gil Blas** *(Plaza de Ramón Pelayo 8, ☎ 94 202 80 28, fax 94 281 83 91, www.parador.es, santillana@parador.es; d 119-135€)*, located in historical company on the main Plaza Ramón Pelayo. Formerly the Barreda-Bracho family palace, the Baroque structure has been preserved in its original styling, with period furni-

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

ture, time-worn plaster walls and subtle brass embellishments. The rooms' terrace perches offer a commanding view of the medieval city and, in some cases, the surrounding countryside.

In the off-season the **Hotel Altamira** *(C/ Cantón 1, ☎ 94 281 80 25, www.hotelaltamira.com, d 52-89€)* is truly a bargain. During the rest of the year one could do worse than ante up the price for a night in the historic Valdivieso palace. While austere by today's standards, the amenities are more than adequate and, by medieval standards, extravagant or impossible.

Apart from these aristocratic dwellings, there are a number of traditional inns with rooms for rent in Santillana. **Posada Santa Juliana** *(C/ Carrera 19, ☎ 94 284 01 06, fax 94 284 01 70, www.santillanadelmar.com, d: 35-50€)* is off a narrow, slanted cobble street in town. The rooms, like the building itself, are old but well-maintained and haven't lost their old-world charm. **Posada La Fontana** *(Queveda 71, ☎ 94 289 59 20, d 35-45€)* is another of the humble, cozy inns.

Camping Santillana del Mar *(☎ 94 281 82 50, fax 94 284 01 83)* is just outside of the village. The site offers amenities including a tennis court, restaurant and thrift store, cabanas, hot showers and hot coffee. Adults are charged 4.80€. To stay next to the caves, head to **Altamira Camping Park** *(Ctra Barreda-San Vicente de la Barquera, km 2.5, ☎ 94 284 01 81).* Though it has fewer facilities than Santilla's campsite, all the basics are on hand, including bath and shower rooms, a restaurant and gas and electrical hook-ups. Adults and tents are 3.31€ apiece per night.

■ Laredo

No minor tourist retreat, Laredo has earned the nickname "Little Copacabana" since the French seized on this spot in the 1960s and prompted its boom. Besides its quaint old quarter, the main draw to Laredo has long been its expansive, moon-shaped beach of **La Salvé**, around which the modern tourism infrastructure of hotels, restaurants, clubs, trinket shops and holiday homes has developed.

Useful Information

Laredo is east of Santander on the N-634. **Alsa buses** *(☎ 94 260 49 67)* run every half-hour from Santander to Calle Reconquista de Sevilla. The **Oficina de Turismo** is on the Alameda Miramar *(☎ 94 261 10 96)*, a mall west of the old quarter on C/ López Seña. **Motoras Adolfo Villa** *(☎ 60 839 26 66)* runs a boat service every 20 minutes from El Puntal de Laredo to Santoña and also offers bay tours.

Sightseeing

At the base of Mount Rastrillar the **Pueblo Viejo**, scattered in a radial cobbled streets around the 13th-century Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María**, echoes the town's storied past, when seafaring rather than sun-tanning was the primary occupation. In 1556 the ailing Emperor Carlos V disembarked at Laredo, spent a few days in the town bestowing it with gifts and praise (and eating the famous sardines, a catalyst for his gout), then headed on the long journey to his final retreat at Yuste in Extremadura, where he died two years later. The 16th-century *ayuntamiento*, at the center of the Puebla Vieja surrounded by the remnants

of medieval defensive walls and gates that have fallen into disuse, bears a melancholic inscription of Carlos V's parting words.

La Batalla de Flores

Each year on the last Friday of August Laredo hosts one of Cantabria's most colorful festivals. La Batalla de Flores (The Battle of the Flowers) celebrates the city's seafaring culture with a street procession of flowery floats, streaming confetti and marching bands. Since the festival originally was held on the water, you'll be expected to use your imagination during the landlocked celebration. Dodge horse-drawn carriages and keep an eye out for the *panchoneras*, attire indicating women who traditionally worked salting fish in the port.

The Puebla Vieja's seven streets are at the eastern end of Playa de Salvé next to the Puerto Pesquero (Fisherman's Port). A tunnel that once connected it to the earliest port has been revamped to serve as an interesting subsurface pedestrian thoroughfare. The architecture in this old quarter is a mix of Gothic and Renaissance highlighted by the **Santa María church**, the **Convento de San Francisco**, and a rich assortment of palaces, the most impressive of which is the **Palacio de Benito Zarauz** on C/ San Francisco.

From the Puebla Vieja, the beachside promenade and Paseo Maritímo run the length of the **Playa de Salvé**, skirting the modern area of town. A finger of land known as El Puntal juts into the sea at the end of this promenade, marking the beginning of the next beach, **Playa de El Regatón**.

Where to Stay & Eat

Hotel El Ancia *(C/ González Gallego 10, ☎ 94 260 55 00, fax 94 261 16 02, ancla@cantabriainter.net)* is one of the nicer establishments in town, occupying an English-style manor a few blocks west of the Puebla Vieja and one block south of Playa de Salvé. Double rooms with a distinctly maritime décor, including pieces salvaged from ancient shipwrecks, range from 55-100€ depending on the season. In the heart of the old quarter, **Hostal Salomón** *(C/ Menéndez Pelayo 11, ☎ 94 260 50 81)* offers affordable rooms, all of which are exterior, and some of which have views of the bay. A double is worth 30-38€ per night.

Camping Playa del Regatón *(☎ 94 260 69 95)* is west of town off the Regatón beach. The moderately sized campsite offers the basics – water, gas, electricity – and also has a small café and supplies store.

Restaurante Somera *($$, C/ Rua Mayor 17, ☎ 94 260 54 48)* in the Puebla Vieja serves regional fare such as the *marmita*, a tuna and potato stew. The seafood *paella* here is also recommended (10€).

■ Castro Urdiales

This lively seaside town is fast-becoming Cantabria's destination numero uno among late-night revelers with less inclination to "do the sights."

Useful Information

Castro Urdiales is east of Santander off the N-634 near the border with the País Vasco. The **Oficina de Turismo** is at the port on Avda de la Constitucion 1, ☎ 94 287 15 12.

Adventure Guides

Aventur *(C/ El Sable 2, Portal A, ☎ 94 286 47 26, www.galleon.com/aventure, aventurcastro@terra.es)* is a multi-sport company in Castro that organizes every sort of adventure imaginable, from scuba diving to rafting, rappelling, caving and canyoning. As the guides aren't specifically limited to the area of Castrol, you'll want to call ahead to make arrangements and find out where to meet (which varies depending on the activity). **Subnorte** *(C/ Victoria Gainza, ☎ 94 286 12 39)* is strictly a dive shop offering lessons, equipment rentals and, of course, escorted trips to the depths.

Sightseeing

The **Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción**, a 13th-century Gothic jewel with a fortress-like bearing, casts a tolerant eye over the town's medieval core and the *marcha* or party action that envelops it each night. On the same modest promontory with the church, the **Castillo-Faro** (Castle Lighthouse) marks the ruins of Castro's once-formidable defensive complex.

During the day, people emerge from their stupors under the sun of **Playa de Ostende**. Sheltered by the bay west of the old quarter, this beach is larger and generally more popular than **Playa Brazomar** to the east. In the interim between the sunset and the onset of the *marcha*, recharge at one of the countless seafood taverns along the port, which specialize in sea bream (*besugo*) and snails (*caracoles*). If you fall victim to the viciously fun cycle that characterizes summertime in Castro Urdiales, take comfort in knowing that the locals live this good life year-round.

Where to Stay & Eat

Seafood lovers and *tapas*-crawlers will find plenty of choices in the old quarter around the Plaza de Ayuntamiento and in La Plazuela in the traditional fisherman's area on the port. The *mesónes*, or traditional taverns, on Calle La Correría, particularly **Mesón El Marinero** *($$, #22, ☎ 94 286 00 05)*, are famed for their sea bream, hake and fresh anchovies in spicy sauce, said to be the best available in all of Spain. In La Plazuela, **Restaurante La Marina** *($$, #16, ☎ 94 286 13 45)* offers steaming paella as well as a daily seafood menu for under 12€.

The two nicest hotels in Castro are on the ☆☆☆ **Playa Brazomar: Hotel Miramar** *(Avda de la Playa 1, ☎ 94 286 02 04, fax 94 287 09 42, Miramardecastro@ceoecant.es, d 65-85€)* and the slightly fancier ☆☆☆ **Hotel Las Rocas** *(Avda de la Playa, s/n, ☎ 94 286 04 00, fax 94 286 13 82, www.lasrocashotel.com, d 90-112€)*. Both are modern hotels with comparable facilities and beach views. In the old quarter's happening Plaza de Ayuntamiento, **Hostal La Sota** *(C/ Correría 1, ☎ 94 287 11 88, fax 94 287 12 84)* offers recently remodeled rooms with television and, for an additional charge, private bath. A double ranges from 42-54€ per night.

Camping Oriñon *(☎ 94 287 86 30)* is on the Playa de Oriñon five km (three miles) west of Castro on the N-634. The large campsite offers complete dining, wasting and retiring facilities. The breaks nearby are well-known to local surfers.

■ Reinosa

Adventures on Snow

In the mountains of southern Cantabria near Reinosa (a large and largely unattractive city), **La Estación Invernal de Alto Campóo** is the province's only ski resort. The 14 runs (eight above-average reds, four moderate blues and two easy greens) spread across a wide bowl, are serviced by four chairlifts and six poma-lifts with a small base comprised of one hotel, equipment rental facilities and two restaurants. Though it has no half-pipe and the bumps fall into grooming neglect, the resort is popular with families from the area and cross-country skiers attracted by the circuit at the base of the hill (a pass for the *circuito de fondo* is 4€ per day).

A one-day lift ticket costs 23€ for adults and 15.50€ for children. **Esqui-Montaña Alto Campoo** (Apdo 36, Reinosa, ☎ *94 277 92 23, fax 94 277 92 23, www.altocampoo.com, informacion@altocampoo.com).* For ski rentals, **Alguiler Agosti** *(☎ 94 274 56 89),* **Deportes Brañavieja** *(☎ 94 275 51 66).* Ski schools are **Escuela Calgosa de Esqui** *(☎ 94 274 56 87)* and **Escela de Esquí Alto Campoo** *(☎ 94 274 54 70).*

Where to Stay

Reinosa has its share of accommodations that aren't usually booked, such as **Hotel Vejo**, the largest in town *(Avda Cantabria 83, ☎ 94 275 17 00, hvejo@infonegocio.com, d 47-62€)*. But you'll want to call ahead in the winter to book reservations for any hotels actually on the slopes. One of these is **Hotel La Corza**, ☎ 94 277 92 50-1.

■ Ramales de la Victoria

Adventures on Foot

While Cantabria's Altamira cave is world-renowned, the lesser-known network of subterranean caverns scattered throughout the province is favored by serious spelunkers (and these you can enter and explore at random). Cavers flock to the high basin of the Río Asón and the valleys of Ruega and Sob in far southeastern Cantabría. The town of **Ramales de la Victoria** is the nearest urban center to these sights, which include the **Cueva de Covalanas** and **Cueva de Cullalvera**, both with primitive prehistoric depictions of horses and other figures adorning their walls *(open every day May-Sept. 10 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm; Oct.-April 10 am-2 pm, closed Mon. and Tues.)* Visits to these caves are limited to 60 people per day, admitted at intervals in groups of 10.

Nearer to the town of Arredondo, west of Ramales, the caves of **Coventosa** and **Cañuela** have less historical significance and thus offer cavers a more liberated experience down below. No guides are necessary, though the usual equipment of hard hats, lights, harnesses and non-slip shoes are a necessity. The former, over 800 meters (2,624 feet) long, offers challenging climbing and

rappelling opportunities, while the latter is known for its enormous stalactites and chambers. The multi-sport company **Aventur** in Castro Urdiales *(C/ El Sable 2, Portal A, ☎ 94 286 47 26, www.galleon.com/aventure, aventurcastro@terra.es)* can supply information and arrange trips to these as well as other caves in the area. For further information, contact the **Federación Española de Espeleologia** *(C/ Ayal, 160, 28009 Madrid, ☎ 91 309 36 74, fax 91 209 15 99, www.personal2.redestb.es/fed-es-esp, federación@fedespeleo.com).*

Asturias

For a region that makes few headlines these days, Asturias had a profound role in shaping the history of Spain. In the ninth century, Asturias emerged to forge the Christian Reconquest after the Moors had been repeatedly routed and repulsed from its mountainous lands. You'll find no delicate Arabic tracery or bubbling fountains here – the Moors simply couldn't hack it this far north. Asturian culture was forged by the Celts and, after a period of Roman intervention, the Visigoths. The bagpipes twill and Spain's earliest churches still stand. During its golden years, before the expanding Christian cause refocused its attention to the south, the unique Pre-Romanesque architecture developed in Asturias. In Oviedo, the region's capital, some of these churches and remnants of palaces are still in evidence and farther afield there are many more.

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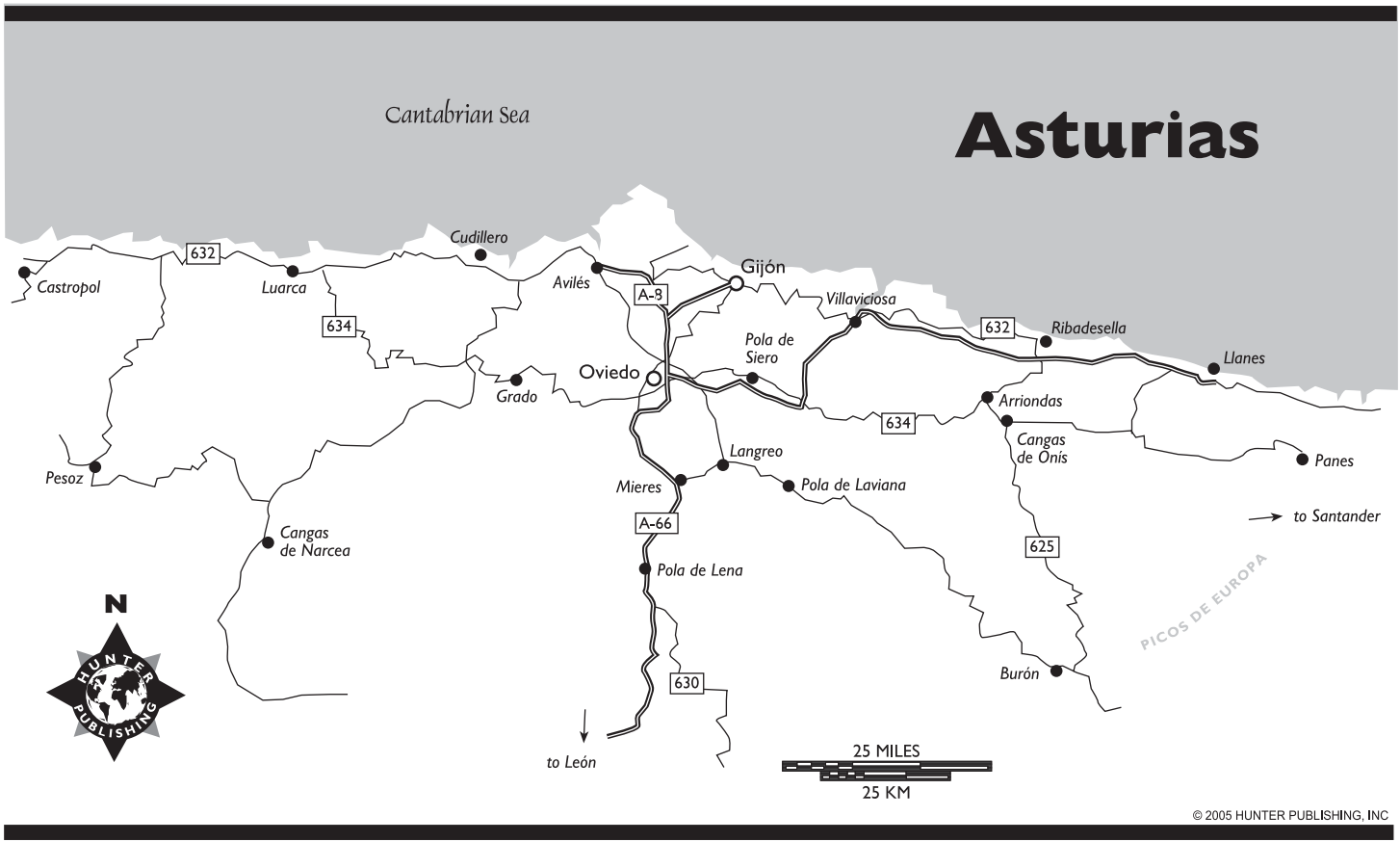
Asturias is a slender region along the Bay of Biscay between Galicia and Cantabria. Like Cantabria it is mountains and coast, mostly green except for the high peaks of the Picos de Europa, Spain's first national park and one of the many reasons Asturias warrants attention. In this park, one can hike along trails that were created by Romans and worn in by mules and traders in the centuries that followed. You may end up at a mountain chalet where *sidra*, Asturias' famed apple cider, is poured in a long arc and finished off in a single gulp. Coming down from the mountains where the coal miners labor, the rivers run a short course to the sea, where sandy beaches alternate with colorful fishing ports that have long served the region's major industry. Asturias can be cold and it is usually rainy, but it is no place to huddle indoors, with mountain sports and summer swims waiting just outside, along with a healthy dose of cider to warm the spirit.

> *"I have nothing to say against the Asturians, save that they are close and penurious whilst at service; but they are not thieves, neither at home nor abroad, and though we must have our wits about us in their country, I have heard we may travel from one end of it to the other without the slightest fear of being either robbed or ill treated, which is not the case in Galicia, where we were always in danger of having our throats cut."*
>
> George Herman Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*

Oviedo

Overlooked Oviedo is poised to turn a new leaf. The capital of Asturias is full of energy – and not just by way of the nearby coal mines – and enjoying a long overdue makeover. A recent urban renewal scheme has put a proverbial fresh coat of paint on the city, added or improved its pedestrian zones and, more than anything, made a walk in its new quarters as enjoyable as a walk in its old quarter.



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■ History

The city was founded when the Monks Máximo and Fromestano established a monastery on its green hill in 761. While the Moors sought unsuccessfully to control this land beyond the mountains, King Alfonso II sought a new royal seat and chose Oviedo in 808. The Pre-Romanesque monuments in and around Oviedo, a style found nowhere else in Europe, are a testament to this king and the 200 or so years that Asturias enjoyed its title as Kingdom, which culminated with the removal of the court to León in 910. King Alfonso II had built a church in honor of Santiago and, together with the relics of Christ still said to be housed in Oviedo, the city became a magnet for pilgrims headed to Galicia on the northern holy route to Santiago de Compostela. A fire in 1521 did little to spoil the city's growing foreign trade industry. Ties with Sevilla and wealth from the Americas led to the establishment of its university in 1608. Oviedo became a leading Spanish educational center and developed liberal leanings that continue to characterize it to this day. By the end of the 19th century the coal mining industry had developed around Oviedo. When a conservative contingent implemented labor reforms for the industry in 1934, the coal miners revolted and the city was heavily damaged. The city staunchly supported the Republic during the Spanish Civil War and as payback suffered heavily under Franco's regime. When the leftist PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) emerged as the leader of the country following Franco's death, it had Oviedo to thank in large part for its electoral victory.

■ Useful Information

Tourism

The **Municipal Tourism Office** *(C/ Marqués de Santa Cruz, s/n, ☎ 98 522 75 86, www.ayto-oviedo.es)* is in a little gray building called El Esorialín on the corner of Plaza de la Escandalera. The building was begun in the 1950s but took far more years than it should have to complete, thus earning it the nickname "little Escorial." There is another tourism office next to the cathedral in Plaza de Alfonso II, ☎ *98 521 33 85.* The **Oficina Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa** *(C/ Arquitecto Reguera 13, ☎ 98 524 14 12)* can provide information, maps and hiking routes to the park. The park's main office in Cangas de Onís has a more extensive store of information (see *Picos de Europa*, pages 540 ff). From Plaza La Escandalera, take C/ Uría past the Campo de San Francisco (it's a park) and after two more blocks, take a left on Calle Gil de Jaz and then a right on Calle Arquitecto Reguera.

Adventure Guides

The **Asociación de Empresas de Turismo Activo y Alberques de Asturias** *(ATAYA, C/ Pérez de la Sala 23, ☎ 98 596 62 82, fax 90 244 70 44, www.fade.es/turismoactivo)* can provide information on sports in the Picos de Europa and accommodations in the area as well as supply trail maps. To reach their office from the Plaza La Escandalera take C/ Marqués de Santa Cruz past the Campo de San Francisco, make the first left on C/ Santa Susana and then a right on C/ Pérez de la Sala. **Deportes Tuno** *(Calle Campoamor 7, ☎ 98 521 48 40)* is the largest sporting goods store in town,

with plenty of packs, rods, thermals, ropes and knowledgeable sales people. They can also arrange sporting activities in the Picos.

■ Festivals

In April and May Oviedo is co-host for the **International Music and Dance Festival of Asturias**. In September the city celebrates with its **Feast of San Mateo** as well as its **Día de America**, which honors the Asturian immigrants to American lands known as *Indianos*.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The **Estación del Norte** *(Avda de Santander)* is easily reached by following Calle Uría from the Campo de San Francisco away from the old quarter. This street dead-ends at the station. Two train services operate out of Oviedo. **RENFE** *(☎ 902 24 02 02)* services the major Spanish cities on a daily basis, including **León** (2½ hours), **Madrid** (eight hours) and **Barcelona** (12-13 hours). **FEVE** *(☎ 90 210 08 18)* is a slower regional carrier with services to the cities of Galicia, Cantabria and País Vasco.

By Bus: Oviedo has a couple of bus terminals. **ALSA** *(Plaza del General Primo de Rivera 1, ☎ 90 242 22 42)* covers the major destinations such as **Madrid**, **Barcelona**, **Sevilla**, **Salamanca**, **Santiago de Compostela** and **León**. The regional bus station at Calle de Jerónimo Ibrán 1 *(☎ 98 529 00 39)* is serviced by the **EASA** company, which runs to other Asturian cities as well as the regions of Cantabria and País Vasco.

By Car: The N-634 runs along Spain's northern coast from Galicia to País Vasco. Both Aviles and Gijón are on this road, just north of Oviedo on the A-66. If arriving from southern Spain, the best route usually runs north through León on the N-630.

■ Sightseeing

The interesting newer section of Oviedo forms a natural extension north from the old quarter and most of the sights, while the city's main park, **Campos de San Francisco**, is just west of both. **Plaza La Escandalera** is a busy nucleus between these three areas. From it, the main pedestrian street of **C/ Pelayo** (which becomes C/ Palacio Valdez) runs north through the newer district, connecting with other pedestrian zones in an area lined with coffee houses and stores all packed with people. In the old quarter the cathedral and many of the sights are gathered around the **Plaza de Alfonso II El Casto**. The old quarter is small and easily navigated afoot, as is the rest of Oviedo. The 17th-century **Plaza de la Constitución** is the location of the *Ayuntamiento* and is the center of activity – but don't miss the **Plaza del Paraguas**, an erstwhile milk market named for the huge umbrella sculpture in its center, and the **Plaza de Trascorrales** with bright, multicolored homes around it and, wouldn't you know, a sculpture of a milk lady.

La Catedral

Though it has plenty of Gothic appeal, the intrigue of Oviedo's cathedral is buried within. It was begun in the 14th century over the Pre-Romanesque re-

mains of King Alfonso II's Iglesia de San Salvador and the palace he had modeled on Charlemagne's castle in Aachen. The **Cámara Santa**, the cathedral's main attraction, was preserved from that period. This vaulted holy chamber, a World Heritage Site, rests beneath the Capilla de Santa Leocadia; it is all that survives from King Alfonso II's palace, built in the ninth century as a coffer for holy relics. A peek into the dank confines reveals the **Caja de Agate**, a bejeweled Romanesque chest that was a gift from Prince Fruela to the cathedral. The silver **Arco Santo**, in a protective glass case, is said to house sacred relics from the Holy Land, including a piece of the crucifix. The arc was salvaged from the Cathedral of Toledo, then capital of the Visigothic kingdom, when the Moors overran the city and effectively conquered Visigoth Spain. Those who survived the attack fled to the mountains in the north, the arc with them. Above the arc are two jewel-encrusted crosses. The first, the **Cruz de los Ángeles**, dates to King Alfonso II's time and is recognized as the symbol of Oviedo. The other is the **Cruz de la Victoría**, which legend holds was a wooden cross carried by King Pelayo during the triumphant battle over the Moors at Covadonga. It was later covered in jewels by King Alfonso III and emblazoned on the Asturian flag along with the Latin motto, *"Hoc signo, tvetvr pivs, Hoc signo vinvitvr inimicvs"* (this sign protects the pious and defeats the enemy).

Also worth visiting in the cathedral are the **Capilla del Rey Casto** (Chapel of the Chaste King), a mausoleum bearing the tombs of King Alfonso II and other royalty; the **Jardine de los Peregrinos**, originally a graveyard for expired pilgrims; the **Museo Diocesano**, housing liturgical relics; and the Gothic **cloister and tower**, the latter of which can be climbed for a lookout on the city. *(☎ 98 520 31 17, open summers Mon.-Sat. 4-8 pm, rest of the year10 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm; Museo Catedral is open summers Mon.-Sat. 4-8 pm, rest of the year Mon.-Fri. 10 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4-6:30 pm; entry 1.50€ for the holy chamber or 2.50€ to also visit the museum and cloister.)*

Around the Catedral

To the left of the Catedral is the **Monasterio de San Pelayo** with its 16th-century church and Romanesque cloister. On Calle de San Vicente, the street running behind the Catedral, you'll find the stained Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María la Real**, originally the temple to the adjoining San Vicente monastery that was founded in the eighth century by Fruela I, heir to King Pelayo. The **Museo Arqueológico** is housed in the cloister of this, the Antiguo Monasterio de San Vicente. The upper cloister contains prehistoric relics, while the rest of the rooms are divided according to Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque periods. Along with an elaborate mosaic by Vega de Ciego, there is a bevy of stones. At times you may find yourself staring at a wall with a bunch of these stones attached with no cheat cards and you'll wonder what it all means. *(C/ San Vicente 3, ☎ 98 521 54 05, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-6 pm, Sun. 11 am-1 pm; free entry).*

The **Museo de Bellas Artes** is just off the Plaza de Alfonso II in front of the Catedral on the street called Rúa. This collection of fine arts is stashed in the 18th-century Palacio de Velarde and the adjoining 17th-century Oviedo Portal. Though a small collection of 16th-century European paintings are on display, the highlight is the 19th- and 20th-century canvases by Asturian artists. Entrance from either Calle Santa Ana or Calle 1-Rúa 8. *(☎ 98 521 30 61, open summers Tues.-Fri. 11 am-2:30 pm and 5-9 pm, Sun. 11 am-2:30 pm; rest of the year Tues.-Fri. 10:30 am-2 pm and 4:30-8:30 pm, Sat. 11:30 am-2 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11:30 am-2:30 pm; free entry.)*

The Pre-Romanesque Monuments of Oviedo

During the period from 718 to 910 when the Kingdom of Asturias rose as the leader of the early Christian Reconquest, expanded and then disappeared with the court's removal to León, a new architectural style emerged. Known as Pre-Romanesque, the style borrowed stylistic cues from earlier cultures and, with a succession of kings and the shelter of the isolated region that spawned it, evolved into a style uniquely Asturian.

The Pre-Romanesque monuments in Asturias can be divided into five major periods, with a highly representative assemblage of these monuments in and around Oviedo. The earliest surviving example is the **Iglesia de Santianes in Pravia**, built between 774 and 783 after the court had been moved to that town from Cangas de Onís (the earliest Pre-Romanesque structure was located in Cangas, though only sketchy reports remain of it). Already this church displayed features that would become standard in later Pre-Romanesque structures, including an eastern-facing ground plan with a central nave and two side aisles, a semi-circular apse and the floral or Corinthian decorative motifs that no doubt borrowed heavily from earlier Roman monuments.

When the court was relocated once and for all to Oviedo under King Alfonso II (792-842), the style came into its own with the construction of a number of churches and palaces, roughly half of which have survived. The **Iglesia de San Julián de los Prados (Santullano)**, on the outskirts of Oviedo above the *autovía* to Gijón, formed part of a series of royal buildings that have since disappeared. It is the largest of the Pre-Romanesque churches, with exquisite interior frescoes depicting ropes, plants, curtains, geometrical shapes – each a characteristic of earlier Roman decorations. Other Pre-Romanesque structures built under the reign of King Alfonso II include the **Iglesia de Santa María de Bendones** and the **Iglesia de San Pedro de Nora**, both outside the city. The years were not so kind to Alfonso II's other efforts. His palace and the Iglesia de San Salvador were leveled in the 14th century to make way for the Catedral (save for the holy chamber) and a 16th-century fire destroyed all but the apse wall of the Iglesia de San Tirso in Oviedo next to the Catedral. Still visible is its triple-arch window, a characteristic of the Pre-Romanesque.

King Ramiro I (842-859) succeeded Alfonso II and during his reign the Pre-Romanesque architecture was markedly refined, giving rise to what is known as the Ramirian style. Situated on the rise of Monte Narranco overlooking Oviedo, **Santa María del Naranco** and **San Miguel de Liño (Lillo)** represent a forward leap in design. The former, a slender rectangular-shaped building, was the first to incorporate a barrel-vaulted ceiling with transverse arches, which eliminated the need for wood. New decorative

touches added to the design, including capitals embellished with cord – a clear Byzantine nod – and the exterior medallions representing a variety of strange animals, a touch characteristic of the Visigoths. The stylistic cues were carried over to San Miguel de Liño, shown at right, which looks rather incomplete because much of its original basilica ground plan fell into rubble during the 13th century. As with the other Pre-Romanesque monuments built before and after, those atop Mount Narranco exhibit the straight lines, vaulted naves and decorative arches that would become standard features of the Romanesque style that followed.

Visiting the Pre-Romanesque Monuments

The **Iglesia de San Julián de los Prados (Santullano)** is past the roundabout La Cruz Roja on a hill above the A-66 *autovía* to Gijón. It's open for guided visits winters Tues.-Sat. 9:30 am-noon, summers 9:30 am-noon and 4-6 pm; entry 1.20€. On Mondays entrance to the church is free but with no guided visits and open from 10 am-1 pm. The **Iglesia de Santa María de Bendones** *(☎ 98 520 36 01)* is five km (three miles) outside the city on Calle San Lázara in the direction of the Valle Nalón. The **Iglesia de San Pedro de Nora** *(☎ 98 520 36 01)* is on the Río Nalón in the village of Trubia, 12 km (7.2 miles) west of Oviedo on the N-634. Both **Santa María del Naranco** and **San Miguel de Liño (Lillo)** overlook Oviedo from Monte Naranco. It's a 25-minute walk uphill on Avda de los Monumentos, with signs pointing the way from the train station. Otherwise, catch the hourly bus off Campo de San Francisco on Calle Uría. Both are generally open May-Sept. Mon.-Sat. 9:30 am-1 pm and 3-7 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-1 pm; rest of the year Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 3-5 pm, Sun. 10 am-1 pm. The entry fee of 2.20€ includes a mandatory guided tour. The opening hours for all of these monuments tend to change rather frequently, so check with the tourism office before setting off.

■ Entertaining Places & Spaces

To find out what's going on in Oviedo, pick up the Spanish-language guide *Agenda de Oviedo* in tourism shops or at kiosks. Though it is a city of over 200,000 and the capital of Asturias, Oviedo isn't especially known for its shopping, party scene or art institutions. Still, there are a few localized areas for those with shared interests. **Calle de Uría** and the pedestrian streets east of it comprise the main shopping district in Oviedo. Walkers and urban bird-watchers flock to the large park **Campo de San Francisco**. Partiers hound the bars and *sidrerías* in the small plazas of the old quarter, including **El Paraguas** and **Riego**. Café Español and CAMCO on Calle Alonso Quintanilla are the largest **art galleries** in town. And if that isn't enough,

the stately 19th-century **Teatro Campoamor** off Plaza La Escandalera hosts a wide array of shows dedicated to the performing arts.

Cider Houses Rule

Asturias is the unequivocal capital of *sidra* in Spain, which means plenty of *sidrerías* or cider houses, with soggy sawdust strewn over their floors, lots of spillage (don't worry, it's all part of the fun) and – if you don't know or follow the customs – more than a few wayward glances from Spaniards that have been drinking the stuff since they were *niños*. The cloudy liquid that ends up in unlabeled green bottles on shelves across the region comes from the must of apples distilled in chestnut vats. On average it acquires an alcohol content of 4-6%, has a slight vinegar flavor and is known to be highly diuretic.

Drinking *sidra* is a social affair rather than a loner's tool to get tipsy – which brings us to the customs. With arms outstretched, the server pours *sidra* in a long arc, filling a shallow glass halfway to the top and leaving the bottle at your disposal. The rather crude pouring process means that more than a few ounces end up on the floor and it also means that the drink is momentarily aerated. Take it like a shot and toss the backwash out on the floor, that's why the sawdust is there or, in some cases, a wooden tub. Since one glass is traditionally shared by a group, this last step is merely a courtesy to the next person in line.

The most popular *sidererías* in Oviedo are located along Calle La Gascona a block away from the Catedral across Calle Jovellanos. The staff at **El Pigüeña** *(C/ Gascona 2, ☎ 98 521 03 41)* schooled me in the art of *sidra* drinking. With wood ceilings and wood on the floor, this traditional *sidrería* is a good place to start. There's no use in staying at one place when you can bounce from one to the next, sampling different ambiances and drinks. Across the street is **Asturias** *(C/ Gascona 9, ☎ 98 521 17 52)* with a touch of cotemporary styling, while on either side of it are two favorites with locals, **Ferroviario** *(C/ Gascona 5, ☎ 98 522 52 15)* and **Villaviciosa** *(C/ Gascona 7, ☎ 98 522 70 61)*.

■ Where to Stay

☆☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Reconquista** *(C/ Gil de Jaz 16, ☎ 98 524 11 00, fax 98 524 11 66, reconquista@hoteldelareconquista.com, d 200€)* was built by kings for kings – you'll find no classier establishment in town. The two-story hotel is wrapped in peach-colored stone with a stately Baroque façade. It was constructed in the 18th century during the reigns of King Fernando VI and Carlos III as a royal hospice and hospital. In the '70s it was renovated and turned into a five-star hotel. A series of Roman-inspired arches lead to the rooms, which come in a variety of shapes and sizes, each with classical styling and spacious baths. Try for a lower price during the off-season.

☆☆☆☆ **Gran Hotel España** *(C/ Jovellanos 2, ☎ 98 522 05 96, fax 98 522 21 40, ghe@hotelestrebol.com, d 100€)* has a longstanding reputation in town and a perfect location between the old quarter and the new. The Catedral is a two-minute walk away. The only detraction is the busy car traffic on Calle Jovellanos. Four-star accommodations and relatively reasonable prices make up for it.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

☆☆ **La Balconada** *(C/ Faro de Limanes 33, ☎ 98 579 37 92, d 45-55€)* is a newly constructed hotel a short walk from the Museo de Bellas Artes. Rooms are generally small but light and comfortable with a slight rustic décor. The emphasis on glass is a plus for natural lighting, as are the rooms that look out onto the hotel garden.

Hostal Oviedo *(C/ Uría 43, ☎ 98 524 10, d 35)* is in the busy shopping district of Calle Uría. Its rooms are small but agreeable with private bath and television. On a recent visit, three valley girls had been staying there for two months, so it can't be all that bad. **Hostal Arcos** *(C/ Magdalena 3, ☎ 98 521 47 73)* is run by a very friendly South American man with a penchant for conversation. Rooms vary – some are small and without private bath, others are larger and with. Have a look around or settle for whichever is in your price range. The price for a double is either 30€ or 40€ for the hosteler's suite. **Hostal Berdasco** *(C/ Fray Ceferino 9, ☎ 98 522 54 85, www.hosteleria.org/hostalberdasco)* is in nearby Arcos in the old quarter. For nighttime action and the sights, it is a good choice. A simple double with private bath costs 35€.

■ What to Eat & Where

The sea and rivers account for Asturias' main culinary offerings. Sea bass, hake, bream, bonito tuna and sardines are common. With Europe's southernmost salmon rivers, Asturias' restaurants are well supplied with Atlantic salmon and also trout. *Morcillas* (blood sausages) commonly hang in the windows of Asturian markets, behind which cheese will likely be stacked to the ceiling. Asturias produces more cheese than any other Spanish province. These range from the sharp blue-veined cheese of the mountains to milder smoked cheese from the coast. Cabrales cheese, made from the milk of goats and cows, enjoys the greatest notoriety in Spain and abroad. *Cocidos* and the *fabada asturiana*, both stews mixed with beans, ham and bacon, are popular rural dishes. For the *llambión*, or sweet-toothed, try *arroz con leche* (rice pudding) or *frixuelos*, a crêpe made from flour, milk and egg, rolled and sprinkled with sugar.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Casa Fermín *($$$$, C/ San Francisco 8, ☎ 98 521 64 52)* is an elegant restaurant on the edge of the old quarter serving traditional Asturian fare with

a modern edge. Reputed to be one of Oviedo's top restaurants, its well-healed clientele enjoys grilled cod in a chickpea purée, scrambled herring eggs with seared potatoes, grilled vegetables in a tomato and pine nut sauce and the traditional *arroz con leche* for desert.

Gato Negro *($$, C/ Mon. 5, ☎ 98 521 70 86)* is the rowdiest *sidrería* in the old quarter. During lunch and dinner hours it serves an 11€ *menu del día* – as long as you can manage to get a table. *Fabada*, a hearty meat and lima bean stew common in this region, makes an appearance in the first course, along with salads and then oxtail and veal tacos.

El Pigüeña *($$$, C/ Gascona 2, ☎ 98 521 03 41)*, a *siderería*, doubles as a competent *marisqueria* or seafood restaurant. Upstairs and downstairs dining areas are airy, with traditionally stiff wooden seats and the kind of lighting that isn't suited to a romantic dinner but typical of real Spanish eateries. Seafood options range from shellfish to hake fish and plenty of choices in between, either fried (*a la romana*), grilled (*a la plancha*) or baked (*al horno*).

Faro Vidio *($$$, C/ Covadonga 32, ☎ 98 521 38 47)* is a more upscale *sidrería* specializing in fish and seafood. The outdoor terrace is nice and the *chipirones rellenos de bogavante* (squid stuffed with lobster) are excellent.

Asturian Coastal Highlights from East to West

It is somewhat foolhardy to attempt a distinction between the east and west coast of Asturias. One is mountainous, with pockets of sandy beaches and others of dark pebbles, green hills and promontories, barren limestone formations that have been twisted and contorted by the sea and wind and small coves long-used by fishermen. The other, separated by the Cabo de Peñas, bears a striking resemblance to the first. Surfers and sailors ply the waters while fishermen haul in the latest catch. Prehistoric caves with animalistic paintings are juxtaposed with Pre-Romanesque monuments. Seafood is prevalent and as dependably good as a walk along the seaside cliff promenade of Llanes is enjoyable.

> **TIP:** To see as much of this coast as possible, consider booking a ride on the **Transcantábrico tourist train**. It runs from the País Vasco through Galicia during a seven-day all-inclusive trip in a restored luxury train, making stops at each of the towns described below (El Transcantábrico, ☎ 91 453 38 06, transcantabrico@feve.es).

■ Llanes

A nice string of beaches around this port town (some say the best Asturias has to offer) entices plenty of outsiders when the sun is shining and the living is easy. The small **Playa Sablón** in town can disappear under a sea of sweating bodies in the summer. At sunrise or sunset, take a walk on the **Camino de San Pedro**, which runs along the top of a cliff overlooking this beach. The beaches expand consecutively to the east with **Playa El Toró** and, past it, **Playa Cué**. Both possess the fine white sand we all know and love, but at **Playa Ballota**, the next beach over, pebbles begin to creep into the mix. In

between Llanes and Ribadesella **Playa San Antolin** is known for its surf. It's a right and left beach break doable for all skill levels.

Llanes was founded as a whaling port and still exhibits a few tattered remains dating from the 13th century when that livelihood was still a viable one, including parts of a defensive wall, a tower and a few unmanned turrets. Recent growth hasn't completely killed the vibe that makes this town one of the most popular tourist destinations on the Asturian coast.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** *(☎ 98 540 01 64)* is off Calle Alfonxo IX in a tower that formed part of the city's original 13th-century defensive bulwark.

Adventure Guides

Llanestur *(Plaza San Roque, s/n, ☎ 98 540 02 05, fax 98 540 02 05, llanestur@fade.es)* offers mountaineering excursions to the Picos for climbing, canyoning, rappelling, caving and mountain biking. For serious climbers, they've constructed a replica of Naranjo de Bulnes to prepare climbers for the occasionally lethal ascent. Scuba diving in the Atlantic is also an option. Each dive costs 30€. Mountain bikes can be rented for 3€ per hour. **Senda** *(C/ La Talá 9, ☎ 98 540 24 30, fax 98 540 24 30)* specializes in horseback rides in the Picos that cost 10€ per hour. **Llanes Actividades Turisticas** *(Avda de la Paz 5, ☎ 5 98 540 10 07, fax 98 540 20 31)* rents mountain bikes (15€ per day) and sea kayaks (21€ per day).

Where to Stay & Eat

La Posada del Rey *(C/ Mayor 11, ☎ 98 540 13 32, fax 98 540 32 88, d 65-100€)* occupies a typical Asturian home in the Casco Antiguo. According to the cheery reception lady, the name refers to King Carlos I, who spent his first night in Spain at this locale in the 16th century. A recent remodel job has given the place a dash of color and modernity to complement the rustic features that make it appealing. Rooms, with handy kitchenettes, are ample and each is distinct from the next. **Sablón's** *(Playa del Sablón 1, ☎ 98 540 07 87, hsablon@fade.es, d 45€-70€)* has one of the best locations in town above the Playa del Sablón and its own very popular restaurant named (what else?) Sablón's ($$). The house specialty is seafood fresh off the dock, including hake and peppers stuffed with crab. **Pensión Iberia** *(C/ Castillo 5, ☎ 98 540 08 91)* offers recently remodeled rooms for 25-30€.

There are over 10 campsites around Llanes. **Camping Entreplayas** *(Playas de Toró-Puerto Chico, ☎ 98 540 08 880)* is on the water next to the beach of Toró. 3€ is the basic charge per night for a person, tent or car. Closest to town and a short walk from the bus station is **Camping Las Bárcenas** *(Las Bárcenas, ☎ 98 540 28 87)*. It's off the N-634 Santander-Oviedo at the entrance to the urban side of town. Facilities include a market, showers with hot water, a swimming pool and café. A 12€ parcel pays for the whole crew (3.46€ each), tent (3.91€) and car (3.31€).

■ Ribadesella

This village is split in two by the Río Sella just before it empties into the sea along with the Río Colunga. A bridge connects the old mariner's quarter and

beach on the east bank from the new, tourism-oriented spread on the opposite side. At 300 m (984 feet), the bridge was the largest in Spain when it was built in the 19th century. It marks the finishing line of the beloved Descenso del Sella, a yearly 17-km (10.6-mile) canoe race that begins in Arriondas near the Picos de Europa. If you happen to land in Ribadesella around the first Saturday in August when this event is going on, expect to sleep on the beach under the stars.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** *(C/ Marqueses de Argüelles, s/n, ☎ 98 586 00 38)* is near the bridge in the newer part of town.

Adventure Guides

Canoeing is the sport of choice in Ribadesella and you'll find plenty of outfitters willing to supply the equipment for a calm jaunt up the Río Sella. **Canoas Oriente** *(Palacio Valdés 14, ☎ 98 586 09 22, fax 98 586 15 55, canoasoriente@eresmas.com)* guides descents down the Sella for 21€ per person. The one-way trip averages four hours with a pick-up at the end. The guides also run canyoneering expeditions around the Picos de Europa. **Actividades Náuticos Cantábrico** *(Plaza de la Atalaya, s/n, ☎ 98 585 82 35)* is a dive shop that also offers coastal boat tours. A single dive costs 30€. **Trasgu Aventura-Sellatur** *(Avda Palacio Valdés, s/n, ☎ 98 586 02 23, trasguaventura@eresmas.co)* rents mountain bikes for half-days at 12€ and guides canoeing and canyoneering trips. A half-day of canyoneering averages between 30€ and 40€.

Adventures on Water

For surfers, **Playa de Vega** west of Ribadesella has an average beach break. **Playa de Ribadisella**, at the river mouth, is a left break that should only be attempted by experts.

Adventures Underground

The **Cueva de Tito Bustillo** was discovered in 1968 nearby in Ribadesella. Its cave paintings depicting horses and deer have been dated to the Middle Magdalenian period, around 12,000 years ago. An exhibition center *(☎ 98 586 11 20)* has been opened next to the caves to handle and inform tourists. The caves are open from April through September Wed.-Sun. 10 am-1 pm and 3:30-5:15 pm, with a daily limit of 400 visitors. It is a short, sign-posted walk from the bridge.

Where to Stay

☆☆☆ **Hotel Ribadesella** *(La Playa, ☎ 98 586 07 15, fax 98 586 02 20, jlgarcia@fade.es, d 45€-70€)* is a classic home, one of the *casas Indianos* built by an Asturian returned from the Americas. The hotel is on the main beach strip and its rooms are full of character.

Albergue Roberto Frassinelli *(C/ Ricardo Cangas 1, ☎ 98 586 13 80)* is a youth hostel on the beachfront. To bunk down, you'll need a YHA hostel card.

Camping Los Sauces *(Ctra San Pedro-Playa, ☎ 98 586 13 12)* is closest to town and just inland from the beach. It's a larger campsite than the alterna-

tives but with fewer facilities. The others are **Camping Ribadesella** *(Sebreño, s/n, ☎ 98 585 82 93, fax 98 585 82 93, www.camping-ribadesella.com, camping.reservas@jade.es)*, in the village of Sebreño a few kilometers west of Ribadesella, and **Camping Playa de Vega** *(Vega, ☎ 98 586 04 06)*, a 10-minute drive west on the N-632 outside of Vega.

■ Villaviciosa

Up one of the few Galicianesque estuaries is Villaviciosa, the leading producer of apples in Asturias. The famous Asturian cider comes from as many as 20 varieties of apples, many of which are mashed, fermented and bottled at Villaviciosa's El Gaitero plant, before being shipped abroad. This factory, along with many others in town, is open to the public for tours, a rather tasty way to sample sparkling ciders while ambling through dank cellars lined with cedar casks.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is in the Plaza del Ayuntamiento, ☎ 98 589 01 66.

Sightseeing

The old quarter of town is interesting for its 18th-century mansions and the 13th-century **Iglesia de Santa María**. King Carlos I landed in this old quarter after setting anchor in the town's port on his maiden voyage to Spain. The marshy confines of Villaviciosa's ría (estuary) are considered unique to the Asturian coast and give way to three beaches with dark sand as the ría opens up to the Cantabrian Sea. The word is still out on why King Alfonso X named it the "vicious village" back in the 13th century. Inexperienced surfers will find the Playa Rodiles vicious, though. This left break at the river mouth is best left to the experts.

Though the sights of Villaviciosa are far from spectacular in the Spanish scheme of things, the surrounding area is dotted with some of Asturias' oldest churches. The main attraction is the **Iglesia de San Salvador de Valdediós**, a Pre-Romanesque jewel built in the ninth century during the reign of King Alfonso III. The king is said to have been detained here after his sons had dispossessed him. The Romanesque **Iglesia y Monasterio de Santa María** is next to the earlier church. The N-113 runs southwest from Villaviciosa to this church. The other nearby Pre-Romanesque church is the **Iglesia de San Salvador de Priesca**, seven km (4.4 miles) outside of town in the direction of Colunga. Three other Romanesque churches are scattered within a few kilometers of Villaviciosa. The 13th-century **Iglesia de Juan de Amandi**, one of the greatest Romanesque churches in Spain, is one km (.6 mile) south of town on the *carretera* running to Santa Eulalia. The **Iglesia de San Salvador de Fuentes**, from the 11th century, is 1½ km (.9 mile) outside of town in the direction of Breceña. The last of those near Villaviciosa is the 13th-century **Iglesia de Santa María de Lugás**, located in the small pueblo of Lugás.

Where to Stay

Hotel Avenida *(C/ Carmen 10, ☎ 98 589 15 09, fax 98 589 15 09, cafedevicente@hotel-avenida.com, d 35-55€)* is a modern hotel in the Casco Antiguo. For the price, the rooms are a steal. The video library on Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque architecture in Asturias could be informative if you speak Spanish.

Casa España *(Plaza Carlos 1, ☎ 98 589 20 30, fax 98 589 26 82, correo@hcasaespana.com)* was the home of the Archdeacon and a chocolate factory before it was destroyed in the 20th century. A typical *Indiano* mansion took its place and served a number of purposes before it was converted into a guest house. The rooms are a little rough from wear and the interior may seem a little somber. A double costs between 40€ and 60€.

Pensión Del Sol *(Calle Sol, ☎ 98 589 11 30)* in the Casco Antiguo has rickety but clean wood floors and sunlit rooms. A double with bath is 30€.

Three campsites are located around Playa de Rodiles north of Villaviciosa – **La Ensenada** *(☎ 98 589 01 57)*, **Fin de Siglo** *(☎ 98 587 65 35)* and the last, tiny, probably less than acceptable **Nery** *(☎ 98 599 61 15)*.

■ Gijón

The wannabe capital of Asturias is large and ungainly. Its seafaring tradition has all but been snuffed out by the metallic purge of heavy industry and its streets could use some cleaning. Still there are a few redeeming qualities to this city and the older locals will gladly point them out over a glass of cider. Anything to paint Gijón in a more flattering light and discredit Oviedo, that little "pueblo" by the mountains, is fine by them. This sort of conversation in Gijón is as dependable as talk about the weather. That it is usually rainy like the rest of Asturias does not help their cause. Thankfully, the city council has recently been inspired to create a number of new museums and contract for sculptures to beautify the city.

Useful Information

The main **Oficina de Turismo** is in the Jardines de la Reina immediately south of the port *(☎ 98 534 60 46)*. Other offices include **InfoAsturias** *(Plaza Mayor 1, ☎ 98 513 70 73)* and the **Sociedad de Turismo y Festejos** *(C/ Maternidad 2, ☎ 98 534 55 61)*.

The **Estación de RENFE** *(Plaza Humedol, ☎ 98 017 02 02)* dispatches trains to other regions in Spain while the **Estación de Tren FEVE** *(same complex: Plaza del Humedal, ☎ 98 534 24 15)* is for the most part relegated to routes along the northern coast. The station is west of town a few blocks south of Playa de Poniente. The **Estación de Autobuses ALSA** is across from the train station off Calle Llanes and services routes throughout Spain *(☎ 98 534 27 13)*.

Sightseeing

The beacon of change in Gijón is the **Elogio del Horizonte**, a monolithic concrete sculpture by Eduardo Chillida on the green hill of the Santa Catalino promontory. Created "In Praise of the Horizon" in 1990, it looks vaguely like a headless robot with arms extended to embrace the city before it. Around the hill in the direction of port is another sculpture, this one iron and equally befuddling, called **Nordeste**

(1994) by Vaquero Turcios. The hill or **Cerro de Santa Catalina** was once the grounds of a military fortress but has since been converted to a park abutting the old fishermen's quarter of Cimadevilla that shares the promontory. The **Plaza Mayor**, home to the *Ayuntamiento* (town hall) and numerous cafés, is the center of this fishy-smelling quarter. Many of the sights are nearby.

The **Museo Casa Natal de Jovellanos** is a recreation of the 14th-century home of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, a politician and writer at the forefront of Spain's 18th-century Age of Enlightenment. The collection on display includes regalia related to Jovellanos, as well as a small collection of Asturian paintings *(Plaza Jovellasons, ☎ 98 534 63 13, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm, free entry)*.

A few blocks east of the square are the **Termas y Muralla Romana**, the excavated remains of a Roman bath and walls *(☎ 98 534 51 47, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm, entry 2.10€)*.

From the Iglesia de San Pedro, **Playa de San Lorenzo** curves east around the bay. Gijón's main beach is paralleled by the **Muro de San Lorenzo**, an esplanade created with walkers in mind. The contemporary art **Museo Barjola** and the sumptuous sandstone **Palacio Revillagigedo** are on the opposite end of Cimadevilla nearest the port *(☎ 98 535 79 39, open Tues.-Sat. 11:30 am-1:30 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 12-2 pm)*. Gijón's other beach, the **Playa de Poniente**, runs west from it.

The **Torre del Reloj**, Gijón's clock tower, doubles as the depository for the city's historical archives and is open to tourists curious to learn more about the city's past *(C/ Recoletas 5, ☎ 98 518 11 11, free entry)*. The fairgrounds for the '92 Expo have been revived with a few interesting museums. The **Museo Etnográfico** is a unique outdoor museum with replicas of traditional Asturian homes and other representations of regional culture. The **Museo Gaita** in the Asturias Pavilion is devoted to the regional music of the bagpipes. A legacy of the Celts, the Asturian bagpipes, like those of Cantabria and Galicia, are smaller than Scottish bagpipes and sound a wee-bit more somber. *(Paseo del Doctor Fleming, s/n, ☎ 98 533 22 44, open Tues-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 11 am-2 pm, free entry.)*

Adventure Guides

Globastur *(☎ 98 535 58 18, fax 98 517 55 75, www.globastur.com)* is all about hot-air ballooning over Asturias. An hour-long flight over the valleys around Gijón costs 150€ and includes breakfast. The real deal over the Picos de Europa costs 390€ and lasts approximately three hours. **Profundidad Gijón** *(C/ Garcilaso de la Vega 35, ☎ 90 215 40 95, fax 98 536 23 68, www.profundidad.com)* is the main dive shop in town. **Marina de Gijón Charter Yacht** *(Avda del Llano 30, ☎ 98 516 45 79, fax 98 516 45 79)* offers four hour floats in a sailboat for 40€ per person.

Adventures on Water

For surfing, although **Playa San Lorenzo** and **Playa de Penarrubia** manage average swells that a beginner needn't shy from, **Playa El Mongol** is where the big boys turn out in force. El Mongol is heavy right break off a reef. The rocks that pop up occasionally and then disappear should make it less appealing to amateurs.

Where to Stay & Eat

The **Parador del Molino Viejo** *(Parque de Isabel la Católica, s/n, ☎ 98 537 05 11, www.parador.es, d 95-117€)* took over for a 19th-century cider mill. Secluded in the Parque de Isabel la Católica, it is a welcome change from the sooty bustle of Gijón. Around this whitewashed complex is a green pond replete with white swans, a gurgling stream and plenty of picnic tables. Inside, it is a rustic affair with stone walls, exposed wooden beams and stained floors. The guest rooms are not overly spacious but tastefully decorated with traditional furniture and equipped with bathrooms and full tubs. The restaurant specializes in regional cuisine and a *siderería* pours plenty of the favorite local drink.

La Casona de Jovellanos *(Plaza de Jovellanos, ☎ 98 534 12 64, fax 98 535 61 51, hotel-lacasona@jazzfree.com, d 40-75€)* occupies a mansion that was founded in the 18th century to house the Asturian Marine and Mining Society. The busy plaza is shared with the home of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos and plenty of ruffians on weekend nights. Rooms bear the names of various famous Asturianos and have classic styling.

Pension Al Mar *(C/ Rodríguez Sampedro 19, ☎ 98 535 08 15, d 30€)* has an ideal location on the Playa de Poniente. Rooms are no-frills and bathrooms are shared. **Alberque Juvenil San Andrés de Cornellana** *(Camino de los Caleros, s/n, ☎ 98 516 06 73)* is perhaps one of the coolest youth hostels in Spain. The bunk rooms and leisure spaces are part of a refurbished 17th-century palace.

There are plenty of terrace cafés on Calle Corrida and as many *sidrerías* off the Plaza Mayor. A good place to try in the plaza is **La Galana** *(Plaza Mayor, ☎ 98 535 84 66)*, a very "in" place to go for a pour or two of *sidra* and an affordable *menu del día*. The place commands attention from the square, while the interior, surrounded by boxes that once held *sidra*, makes it obvious just how popular the drink is.

El Piano *(C/ Cabrales 12, ☎ 98 534 22 57)* is on Playa de San Lorenzo and frequented for its *cabrito* and *fabada*, the traditional Asturian stew with butter beans and pork. To go all out, try **Casa Victor** *(C/ El Carmen 11, ☎ 98 534 83 10)*, an elegant restaurant specializing in seafood. House specialties include hake, grilled sea bass in fig oil, tender sirloins (still, as usual, a disappointment, despite the price) and a mango soufflé for dessert.

■ Cudillero

One of the cheeriest coastal villages in Asturias, Cudillero is a great destination for summertime tourists looking to avoid the gaudy tourism infrastructure that usually comes with the territory. Toss the idea of sightseeing aside and head down the one main street to the port – a small rocky cove anchored with green and red fishing boats. It is surrounded by hills covered with *casas colgadas* (hanging houses), each painted in a bright shade of yellow, red or green. The port and the Plaza de Marina are the focal points of Cudillero's social life and where, each year in celebration of L'Amuravela on August 29th, the town crier gives a humorous if somewhat critical account of the past year's events.

Where to Stay & Eat

The bright blue **Casona Selgas** *(Avda Selgas, s/n, ☎ 98 559 01 13)* is a historical *Indiano* mansion with eight rooms for rent. Suave contemporary décor intermingles with the traditional iron post beds and wood floors. A double room with full bath, television and telephone costs 50-65€. **Hotel La Lupa** *(C/ San Juan de Pinera, ☎ 98 559 00 63, d 21€)* offers plain Jane rooms with television and shared baths. **Casa Lupa**, the restaurant downstairs, serves seafood *paella* and *fabada asturiana* (butter beans with bacon, chicken stock and often chorizos).

Camping Cudillera *(Ctra Playa del Aguilar, ☎ 98 559 06 63)* is east of town in the direction of the Aguilar beach. Another well-equipped site is **Camping L'Amuravela** *(Tolombreo, ☎ 98 559 09 95, fax 98 559 09 95)*, west of town in the small village of El Pito.

■ Luarca

The "white town" of Asturias' green coast clings precariously to two opposing cliffs split by the Río Luarca; its old houses conform to the natural terraces carved in stages by this river eons ago. Before this setting began to attract tourists, it left an impression on the traveling bible salesman George Herman Borrow, who wrote that it "stands in a deep hollow, whose sides are so precipitous that it is impossible to descry the town until you stand just above it. At the northern extremity of this hollow is a small harbor, the sea entering it by a narrow cleft." Then, as with today, a bright fleet of fishing boats anchored in the harbor constitutes Luarca's traditional economy. The 14th-century **Palacio de Marqueses** and a ruined castle are sights, but the fishermen are the spectacle. In the afternoons when they troll back to the port their wives and children scurry down to the docks to help unload the crates of fish where they can. If you're camping, they'll sell whatever tuna or hake they've caught right off the boat.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is on C/ Olavarrieta 27, ☎ 98 564 00 83.

Adventure Guides

Samsara *(C/ Olabarrieta 12, ☎ 98 547 09 90, freixas@ozu.es)* caters to all your outdoor needs in Luarca. They rent mountain bikes and guide rafting, hiking, horseback, 4x4, canyoning and other excursions into the Valdés district.

Adventures on Water

Luarca has three beaches nearby, the closest of which is **Playa de Tourán**. More desirable for surfers is the **Playa de Otur**, six km (3.6 miles) farther west; it is larger and has surfable waves. To the east the pebbly **Playa de Cueva**, set in the niche of a rocky coastal protuberance, also manages a few wimpy waves. Farther west, the other surf beaches are **Ferjulfe**, **Navia**, **Tapia de Casariego** and **Pennaronda**.

Where to Stay & Eat

Villa La Argentina *(Villar de Luarco, s/n, ☎ 98 564 01 02, fax 98 564 09 73, reserves@villalaargentina.co, d 52-80€)* preserves a 19th-century *casa Indiano* – a mansion built by an Asturian who immigrated to the Americas and subsequently returned with much more money than he began with. The interiors are elegantly decorated with gold accents, crystal chandeliers and 19th-century furniture. A nice garden, swimming pool and tennis court are part of the deal.

Pensión La Moderna *(C/ Crucero 2, ☎ 98 564 00 57)* is also in a refurbished *casa Indiano*, though its rooms and décor are pared down to the basics. Some of the rooms are more spacious than others and cost 25-30€ for a double.

Casa Consuelo *(Ctra San-Sebastián-Santiago, km 511)* is the best restaurant in the area. Specialties include calamari and butter beans, fish sautéed in cider and hake topped with *angula*, which are baby eels and a delicacy in this region. The restaurant is six km (3.6 miles) west of town in Otur. In town the majority of restaurants are located along the waterfront off Paseo del Muelle.

Camping Los Cantiles *(C.N.-634, km 502.7, ☎ 98 564 09 83, www.connectia.net/cantiles, cantiles@conectia.net)* is nearest Luarca on a rocky piece of coastline. The grounds include a café, washing machines, market and hot showers. **Camping Playa de Taurán** *(Taurán, El Acantilado, ☎ 98 564 12 72, www.campingtauran.com)* is on the west side of town next to Luarca's closest beach, Taurán. Both it and **Camping Playa de Otur** *(Ctra Playa de Otur, ☎ 98 564 01 17, www.inicia.es/de/cotur)* have plenty of facilities; the latter, however, is closest to the nicer beach.

Picos de Europa

Spain's original national park harbors swift-flowing salmon rivers cut through improbably sheer gorges, a bounty of barren limestone peaks that rise above 2,000 meters (6,560 feet) before disappearing into the daily fog. There are endangered brown bears and wolves here, along with a handful of solitary farmers who sleep with their livestock in small stone and thatched huts called *majadas* and occasionally straggle into one or another isolated mountain village. Shared by the provinces of León, Asturias and Cantabria, the Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa claims the western extension of the Cordillera Cantabrica that edges along Spain's northern Atlantic coast from the foothills of Galicia in the west to the País Vasco in the east.

The Picos de Europa is divided by the river valleys of the Sella, Cares and Deva into three massifs, El Cornión in the west, Los Urrieles in the center and Ándara in the east. Just 15 km (nine miles) away from the Costa Verde on the Bay of Biscay, the mountains rise abruptly, with an average height of 1,220 m (4,000 feet) and the highest point at Peña Cerredo (2,648 m/8,685 feet). The proximity to the ocean keeps the Picos windy and wet, with relatively no dry season. In the highest alpine zone, peaks are snow-covered year-round and – with the exception of soaring vultures and eagles, the chamois and occasional rock climbers – mostly empty.

■ History

The Picos have been a rugged no-man's land for much of their history, inhabited only by a few groups of villagers that subsisted by raising goats and cattle and making local handicrafts (though this is no longer true in the summer). The highest peak wasn't climbed until the early 20th century. Far earlier, the Moors – who had already spread across most of the peninsula – were skeptical about finishing the job, which entailed pushing into these mountains to face the mysterious land and people here and northward. When they finally summoned the resolve to attempt the feat, they were brutally put down by a band of Visigoths led by Pelayo; as legend has it, the general was aided by divine intervention when an avalanche crushed the Moorish forces. This, the Battle of Covadonga, marked the beginning of the Christian Reconquest. In 1918, King Alfonso III created the Parque Natural de la Montaña Covadonga to commemorate the battle that took place 1,200 years earlier. The original park consisted of the western massif only; it was later renamed and expanded to encompass the other two massifs for a total 64,660 hectares (181,000 acres) in an area roughly 40 km long and 25 km wide (24 by 15 miles).

■ Wildlife

Birds of prey are the trademark of the Picos and include the griffon (seen at right) and Egyptian vultures, booted and short-toed eagles, owls, sparrow hawks and chough. Beneath the barren alpine zone, the natural park begins to blossom. Scrublands of fern and juniper give way to meadowlands. When the snow melts these *brañas* turn green; farmers move back into their *chozos* (crude huts) and cattle, horses, goats and sheep are let out to graze. Roe and red deer are prevalent as the meadows fall to the richest areas around the rivers harboring plenty of frogs, trout and salmon; these areas have daffodils and a variety of orchids with stands of beech, oak, ash and elm trees. In this realm lurk the endangered brown bear and the capercaille, as well as wildcats, foxes, wild boar and wolves. Another oddity is the mole-like animal called the Pyrenean desman, which has unfortunately been on the decline due to human incursions. One third of all Europe's butterflies have been identified in the park, joined by woodpeckers, tits, golden orioles and a wealth of other flyers.

■ Planning for Adventure

With unreliable public transportation, hiking is both a pastime in the Picos de Europa and a necessity. On the roads between villages you're likely to see more hikers than cars and this is one of the most enjoyable ways to explore the park. Off road, the Picos have an exceptional network of trails leading to the most popular areas, including peaks, cirque lakes, caverns carved by underground springs and deep canyons. Some of these trails are inspiring, cut into canyon walls centuries ago high above rivers, while others carry on through thick forests or up harrowingly steep and cold peaks.

For a full trail map stop at one of the tourism offices in the Picos (which are also mentioned below). En route, you may well pass others with plans to go caving, climbing or paragliding. There are exceptional areas for each inside the park and as many as possible are described below. Care should be taken

to wear or pack protective clothing – with the exception of the rain, the weather in the Picos can be unpredictable and fierce. If at all possible, travel these routes in pairs and if not, be sure to leave notice with someone at the base of where you are going and when you are returning (at the tourism office, if necessary).

While the number of visitors to the Picos is increasing each year, there are still plenty of wild spaces to enjoy with no one else around for miles. It's a blessing, but it can be a curse, so prepare accordingly. Mountain biking is another popular pastime in the park and a number of trails are well-marked from the towns. Off the trails there are numerous opportunities for canoeing and fishing in the rivers – though for the latter you'll need to buy a fishing permit at the tourism office and that's never a bad place to start in any case.

■ Useful Information

Park Offices

The main park headquarters and information source is the **Casa Dago National Park Nature Study and Visitor Reception Center** in the town of Cangas de Onís, Asturias *(Avda de Covadonga 43, ☎ 98 584 86 14)*. It's open every day in the winter from 8 am-3 pm and 4-6:30 pm and in the summer from 8 am-9 pm. There are two more park centers near the other main entrance points to the park. In the east is the **Cantabrian National Park Office** in the town of Camaleño *(Ctra Potes-Fuente Dé, ☎ 94 273 32 01; open daily 9 am-2:30p and 4-6 pm)*, while to the south the **Leon National Park Office** is in the town of Posada de Valdeón *(Ctra Cordiñanes, ☎ 98 774 05 49, open April-Sept. 9 am-2 pm and 4:30-6:30 pm and the rest of the year 8 am-3 pm)*. From July through September the park officials offer free guided excursions in the Picos. These hikes follow the major trails in the park and generally last around four hours.

■ When to Go

In the winter the Picos are all but deserted, and with good reason. Fierce northerlies slam these mountains with snow and high winds on an almost daily basis. When and where it's not snowing, it's usually raining. As a result, many of the mountain *refugios*, adventure guides and campsites close down during these months. The weather improves in the springtime, though the showers continue and don't noticeably abate until August. With the most dependable weather, August is the high season for tourists to the Picos de Europa and many of the accommodations in the base villages described below fill up fast during this month. The tourist crush usually begins in June and carries on through early September. While the weather is not as dependable in May and late September, these can be ideal times to visit the park with minimal interference. And don't forget a raincoat!

■ Getting Here & Around

Public buses will get you to the main villages outside of the park. From there you'll need a rental car to really get down to the business of exploring, as buses run infrequently to the smaller villages in and around the Picos. There are daily buses to Arriondas and

Cangas de Onís from Oviedo and Santander to Potes. Without your own transportation, taxis are the best way to get around in the Picos. If you plan a big hike, you can arrange with the driver to pick you up at the end of a trail. Almost all of these drivers have grown up in the area, are familiar with the territory and happy to share information.

■ Western Massif (El Cornión)

The Western Massif of El Cornión corresponds with the original confines of the Mt. Covadonga National Park established by King Alfonso VIII in 1918. It is shared by the district of Sajambre to the south in the province of León and the Ponga district to the north in Asturias. The Desfiladero de los Beyos (Beyos Ravine) carved by the Río Sella marks its western border – as well as that of the park. To the east, the Garganta del Cares (Cares Gorge) cut by the swift-flowing Río Cares separates El Cornión from the central massif of Los Urrieles. Glacial lakes are a unique feature of El Cornión; the two largest and most popular as a starting point for hikes, Lago Enol and Lago Ercina, are almost side-by-side. They can be reached by road from Cangas de Onís, the main base town for this area as well as the park on the whole. From Cangas de Onís the N-625 runs along the western border of the park while the AS-114 runs east along its northern edge.

While not as high on average as the other massifs, El Cornión does have a number of imposing peaks, including Peña Santa (2,596 m/8,515 feet), Torre de Santa María (2,486 m/8,154 feet), Torre Bermeja (2,400 m/7,870 feet) and Torre Parda (2,314 m/7,590 feet).

Arriondas

The word on Arriondas is that it's a canoeing town. It is situated on the banks of the Río Sella with the Picos de Europa roughly 15 km (nine miles) southeast, accessible via the N-625 passing through Cangas de Onís. The small Sierra del Sueve is visible a few kilometers to the northwest, one of the last refuges for the wild Asturcón horses which are said to have roamed the area for over 1,000 years.

Cangas is preferable as a base camp, but Arriondas has a campsite and plenty of adventure guides, most of whom are devoted to canoe trips. Beginning on the first Friday in August Arriondas celebrates its favorite sport with the Fiesta de las Piraguas. The three-day party is highlighted the following Saturday by a crowded canoe race down the Río Sella as far as Ribadesella. The winner of the 17-km (11-mile) race is awarded bragging rights for the rest of the year. Arriondas will be packed during this celebration, the guides won't be guiding tours down the river and the overflow of people usually fills up accommodations in the surrounding towns, including Cangas de Onís.

Camping Sella *(Ctra Santianes, ☎ 98 584 09 68, fax 98 584 01 32)* is on the banks of the river just outside of town. It's open from April 1-April 19 and then from June 15-September 15. The campsite has a market, small café and shower facilities. Adults are charged 3.46€ per night and 2.85€ more with a car.

Adventures on Water

The most common canoe trip in Arriondas is a leisurely one down the Río Sella towards the coast. There are no rapids here (although some of the guides are willing to make excursions to frothier waters in the area). The leisurely trip is around 15 km (nine miles)

long and takes from four to six hours. Expect to pay around 20€ per person, which includes a pick-up at the end and return to Arriondas. The **Escuela Asturiana de Piragüiso** *(C/ El Barco 12, ☎ 98 584 12 82, fax 98 584 12 82, www.piraguismo.com, eap@piraguismo.com)* is the main canoeing school in town and it runs trips down the Sella for 18€ per person. The school also makes guided rafting and canoeing trips on the grade III-V waters of the Río Cares-Deva. **Fym Aventura** *(Plaza de Venancio Pando, s/n, ☎ 98 584 11 00, fax 98 584 06 41, www.fymaventura.com)* is run by Ramón Ferra, champion of the 1993 Descenso del Sella (the annual Descent of the Sella River canoe race). Ramón and his crew charge 21€ for the Río Sella canoe trip; they also offer canyoning and caving excursions and rent horses for 10€ per hour. If these companies are booked for the day, have them recommend another, as there are at least 15 guide services in Arriondas.

Cangas de Onís

Never mind the adventure-seekers that flood into Cangas de Onís in the summer. It is a great little town set in a fertile valley with two clear rivers running around it. About 1,200 years ago Cangas de Onís became the short-lived capital of Christian Spain after King Pelayo trumped the Moors in a nearby cave (see *Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Covadonga*, below, for that tale). Today it is the capital of the Picos de Europa, with plenty of lodgings, outfitters and a few sights worthy of mention.

The Puente Romana, left, over the Río Sella is a town landmark with a neat victory cross hanging from the crook of its center arch. The **Iglesia Parroquial de Cangas de Onís** is an odd church built over a former nobleman's palace in 1963. Its three-story steeple curiously resembles a step pyramid. There are also a few palaces in town, including 16th-century Renaissance **Cortés Palacio** off the Plaza del Mercado, the **Palacioa Pintu**, a replica of the original 17th-century one, and the **Casa Dago**, built in 1920 and now housing the national park information center.

Adventure Guides

For canyoning, climbing, rafting, canoeing, 4x4 tours and horseback riding try **Alto Sella Naturaleza y Deporte** *(Calzada de Ponga 25, ☎ fax 98 594 47 66, www.gratisweb.com/altosella, altosella@latinmail.com).* Other companies in town that offer roughly the same adventure choices are **Centro de Aventura Hotel Monteverde** *(C/ Sargento Provisional 5, ☎ 98 584 80 79, fax 98 584 83 70, www.hotelmonteverde.cjb.net, montever@arrakis.es)* and **Viesca Turismo y Aventura** *(Avda del Puente Romano 1, ☎ 60 050 30 00, fax 98 535 73 69, www.aventuraviesca.com).*

Sightseeing

Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Covadonga: The impressive sanctuary at the royal site of Covadonga is recognized as the cradle of modern Spain. In 722 the Moors invaded the lands of the Cordillera Cantabrica. A contingent of poor Visigoth holdouts from Asturias and Cantabria led by the nobleman Pelayo met and defeated them

at the cave of Covadonga near Cangas de Onís. The battle marked a turning point for Christian Spain and the beginning of the Reconquest. Cangas de Onís was made capital of the new Asturian kingdom and the nobleman Pelayo crowned its king. Pelayo's heirs went on to consolidate the northern region the capital was soon moved to Oviedo. By the time his grandson King Alfonso I had taken the helm, counter-sorties were being carried out as far south as the Duero Valley. In short order more northern Spanish kingdoms joined forces and the capital of the expanding Christian Spain continued its hopscotch to the south.

The sanctuary complex is located in thick woods on the face of the Auseva Mountain. A small chapel sits in a cave, known as the Santa Cueva, carved in the mountainside high above the rest of the monuments. These include the 16th-century **La Colegiata** (Collegiate Church), **La Hospedería** (Guest Quarters), **La Casa de Canónigos** (Canons' House) and **La Basílica de Santa María la Real de Covadonga**. The latter was built at the end of the 19th century in the Neo-Romantic style. A waterfall just below Santa Cueva crashes into a pool highlighted by the Siete Caños (Seven Spouts), inspiration for an Asturian folk song with the words, *"La neña que d'ella bebe, dentro del añu se casa"* ("If you drink of the fountain you'll be married in a year").

From the small square at the base of the cave 101 steps lead up to it. Tradition has it that if you make a wish, toss a coin into the pond and then mount the steps on your knees, the wish will come true. An 18th-century icon of the Virgin greets you at the top, surrounded by images of Asturian kings. The graves of King Alfonso I and Pelayo are entombed in the chapel.

To reach the sanctuary, take the AS-114 east from Cangas de Onís and at the AS-262 marked by a sign to the site, turn right. The sanctuary is roughly four km (2.4 miles) to the south.

From Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Covadonga it's easy to continue on into the park via the narrow and winding C-04 to the **Covadonga Lakes**. Midway up this 12-km (7.2-mile) drive, stop at the **Mirador de la Reina** and put the camera in panoramic mode to capture the moment. At the top there is a car park next to the Lagos de Enol and Ercina, a free campsite (*zona de acampada*) and the mountain **Refugio Vega de Enol** *(☎ 98 584 85 76)* with bunk beds and a skimpy café.

Adventures on Foot

The small glacial Covadonga lakes mark the starting point for a number of popular trails into the Western Massif. The hike up to the Vega de Ario, the Mirador de Ordiales and the forest of Pome are favorites. The **Vega de Ario** route takes up to nine hours round-trip and is moderately difficult. The trail begins at Lake Ercina and skirts the water into the meadowlands of Verguina. A group of private mountain *refugios* and a fountain are located at the end of the meadow as the trail begins to ascend, following the small water ditch of the Riego del Brazo. It leads through the narrow canal of Cuenye, where another meadow and fountain awaits. From here the trail climbs the hillside of Las Reblagas and then levels out at the top in a clearing.

Another ascent leads up the **Jitu Hill** where, at the top, the trail cuts to the left and leads to the mountain **Refugio Villaviciosa** *(☎ 63 981 20 69)* in the Vega de Ario. The **Mirador de Ordiales** route is slightly less difficult and

shorter, taking five-six hours, depending on your pace. The trailhead is at the car park of Lago de Enol and the route shortly arrives at the Pozo de Alemán (German well), named in honor of the German Frasinelli who spent much of his life exploring and studying the Picos. You'll pass another spring and then a sheep fold. After the grouping of *cabañas* (crude mountain homes) on the left the trail passes through a meadow and ascends the Collado de la Gamonal. At the top of this hill is the **Refugio Vegarredonda** *(☎ 98 592 29 52)* and a chance to re-hydrate. The trail swings right and climbs through the gorge of Cuenye to the top of the hill of Forcau. From this point the trail falls gradually through meadows to the mountain *refugio* of Ordiales. The *mirador* is a short climb from the *refugio* and affords a wide view of the Valle de Angón.

To reach the **Bosque de Pome** (Pome Forest) a path departs from the *vega*, or meadowlands of Lake Enol. In roughly 10 minutes you'll reach the **Mirador del Rey** (King's Lookout) and from there the trail descends through the forest. This hike takes around four hours round-trip and, because of the grade, is more difficult in return.

La Senda del Arcediano (The Archdeacon's Trail) is recognized as one of the oldest trails in the Picos de Europa. It follows a Roman road that was greatly improved in the 17th century by Pedro Díaz de Oseja, Archdeacon of Villaviciosa. Díaz went spent much of his time ironing out the kinks of this important trade route linking Castilla with the ocean and even stipulated in his will that 20 ducats a year be spent on its upkeep. While the entire route stretches 28 km (17 miles) from Pontón to Amieva, most prefer the five- to six-hour, 15-km (9.4-mile) stretch between Soto de Sajambre and Amieva. It's an easy-to-moderate walk. From Soto in the León valley of Sajambre, the path ascends 525 m (1,600 feet) to the **Puerto de Beza** (Beza Pass). From there, it begins a steady descent into the province of Asturias punctuated by occasional level stretches. After passing the peak of **Canto Cabronero** (1,996 m/6,547 feet) off to the right, the trail begins to follow the course of the Río Taneyo. The peak of **Valedepino** (1,744 m/5,720 feet) will be on the left as the river cuts through a grassy meadow and the trail falls into the thick of ash and chestnut trees. With a few kilometers to go, the trail widens out onto a road at El Cueto and continues from there to Amieva (600 m/1,968 feet elevation).

The cave lands of the Picos de Europa begin just east of Cangas de Onís. Following the AS-114, **Las Cuevas de Los Azules** are less than a kilometer outside of town in the *barrio* known as Contranquil. Unfortunately, this network of caves, which has yielded a number of Neolithic relics as well as the grave of a man over 9,500 years old, was closed as this book went to press. But all is not lost. Continue east for another kilometer and make a left at the turn-off for Cardes. From this town, a 15 minute trail leads to the **Cueva Buxu**. The cave was discovered in 1918 and archaeological excavations have deduced that it was inhabited roughly 18,000 years ago by hunters who came from the coast in the summer to fish and hunt. The walls are adorned with prehistoric cave art depicting goats, horses, a deer and plenty of abstract symbols. There is a limit of 25 visitors per day to the caves so call ahead unless you just happen to be in the area, ☎ 98 594 00 54.

Another cave, **Cueva de Güelga**, is five kilometers (three miles) southeast of Cangas de Onís. This cave has been shaped by an underground stream into

a number of large galleries. The remains of tools and animal bones indicate that hunters used this cave 14,000 years ago as a trap into which they herded wild deer. Check with the tourism office in Cangas de Onís before setting off for a spelunking adventure in this cave.

Where to Stay

Though Cangas has plenty of hotels, they can quickly fill up in the summer, so it never hurts to call ahead. The ☆☆ **Hotel Puente Romana** *(Puente Romano, s/n, ☎ 98 584 93 39, fax 98 594 72 84, puenteromano@hispaportal.com)* is, as you might expect, next to the Roman bridge on the water. It's a comfortable hotel in a 19th-century palace. In the low season a double is around 35€, but in the high season it jumps to 65€.

On the upside, there's the **Parador de Cangas de Onís** *(Villanueva, s/n, ☎ 98 584 94 02, fax 98 584 95 20, cangas@parador.es, d 90-100€)* a few kilometers east of town. It occupies the former Monasterio de San Pedro de Villanueva, founded by Alfonso I in the ninth century. The church, despite later modifications, still evokes a strong sense of the Romanesque. Monks lived in the monastery until 1835, when they were forced to leave as the bankrupt Spanish government sold off church holdings.

Cheaper accommodations in Cangas include the ☆ **Hotel Piloña** *(C/ San Pelayo 19, ☎ 98 584 80 88, fax 98 594 73 76, d 25€-60€ depending on the season)* and the **Pension Torreón** *(C/ San Pelayo 32, ☎ 98 584 82 11)*, offering eight simple rooms with bath. A double could be 25€, or 45€.

The nearest camping sites are **Camping Sella** *(Ctra Santianes, ☎ 98 584 09 68)* in Arriondas to the west and **Camping Picos de Europa** *(Ctra Cangas de Onís-Cabrales, km 16, ☎ 98 584 42 40, www.picos_europa.com)* in Avín to the east. Both charge around 3€ per night and have the works, including a restaurant, showers, grocery store, gas and electrical hook-ups and swimming pools.

Where to Eat

The best place to head in town for something to eat is the main **Avda Covadonga**, running lengthwise with the Río Güeña, or the **Calle San Pelayo**, one block farther away from the river. Plenty of these are also *sidrerías* (Asturias' version of the *cervecería*). One recommendation is **El Llagar Casa Juan** *(☎ Avda Covadonga 20, ☎ 98 584 81 41),* which cooks a good *fabada Asturiana* (traditional pork and bean stew) and a unique corn tart with chorizo, eggs and French fries called the *Juanón*.

> **TIP:** If you missed the tip above on how to drink cider, here's a reminder: take it like a shot then toss the backwash on the floor (it doesn't hurt to check and see if sawdust or bins have been laid out for this very reason).

■ Central Massif (Los Urrieles)

The central Picos de Europa has the tallest peaks in the park and is a magnet to mountain climbers. The highest is the **Torre de Cerredo** (2,648 m/8,686 feet), though by far the most popular is the spindly **Naranjo de Bulnus** (2,519 m/8,262 feet), sometimes referred to as the Picu Urriellu. The Central

Massif is separated from its western counterpart by the immense gorge carved by the Río Cares. Known as **La Garganta Divina**, its vertical walls rise in places up to 2,000 m (6,560 feet). An ancient mule trail cut into its walls makes for an extremely popular, if over-crowded, hike. The Río Duje, a tributary of the Cares and the Río Deva mark the eastern boundary with the Andara massif.

Villages

Posada de Valdeón is a quaint smattering of buildings in the León province, south of the Central Massif on the streams that form the Río Cares. Though it's the main village in the Valdeón valley, Posada is little more than two-story stone and timber houses and stunning views. Its name *posada* is Spanish for "inn," referring to its subsistence on Picos tourism. Ironically, it looks as if perhaps five families in town make their living from tourists. There are two hostel-residencias in town**. Abascal** *(C/ El Salvador, s/n, ☎ 98 774 05 07)* offers heated double rooms with private bath and television for 43€ and rooms with sink for 32€. **Corona** *(La Escuela, s/n, ☎ 98 774 05 78)* has no-frills double rooms with bath for 30-35€. The nearest campsite is in Soto de Valdeón, two kilometers (1.2 miles) west of Posada. **Camping Valdeón** *(Ctra Pontón-Posada de Valdeón, km 13, ☎ 98 774 26 05)* is open from June 15-Sept. 15. It's a small campsite on the river with adequate facilities, including a small market and café.

A narrow and occasionally nerve-wracking road connects Posada de Valdeón to the village of **Caín** in the north, between the Western and Central Massifs at the head of the Garganta del Cares. Caín, the northernmost village in Castilla y León, is the starting point for the famous hike through the Cares gorge (described below). Along with a few restaurants, the rustic chalet **La Posada del Montañero** *(Caín D.P., ☎ 98 774 27 11)* has six rooms with heating for rent, along with a small café. Doubles are 60€. A cheaper alternative is **La Ruta** *(Travesía del Cares 15, ☎ 98 774 27 02, laruta@arrakis.es)*, with heated doubles, satellite television and private baths for 37€. The road ends at Caín.

To reach the Asturian side of the Central Massif you'll have to make the hike that ends at **Puente Poncebos** with its power plant. This village is basically a stopover for people headed to explore the Central Massif. One road leads north to **Arenas de Cabrales** (with a campsite) on the main AS-114 that skirts the northern flank of the Picos de Europa. Another leads east to **Sotres**, the highest village in the Picos and starting point for a number of hikes. **Pension La Perdíz** *(Sotres de Cabrales, ☎ 98 594 50 11, hotel.laperdiz@terra.es)* rents comfortably furnished doubles for 30-35€ per night. To the west of Poncebos, less than a kilometer away, is the hamlet of **Camarmeña**, which has a *mirador* with views of the central peaks. Off this road an underground funicular railroad has been constructed to connect Puente Poncebos with the village of **Bulnes**, a common base for ascending the central peaks. The railroad was not without its detractors, who feared it would damage the precious ecology of the area. The villagers don't seem to mind the new way, which has made their lives a lot easier. The ☆ **Hostal Poncebos** *(☎ 98 584 64 47, hostalponcebos@wanadoo.es)* is one of the only accommodations in the village. Double rooms are available with bath for 45-55€ and with sink basin and communal bath for 28-33€.

Adventures on Foot

La Ruta de la Garganta del Cares: As far as day hikes go, this is *the* trail in the Picos de Europa. The 12-km (7.5-miles) hike begins in the town of Caín (or, if heading in the opposite direction, from Puente Poncebos) near the headwaters of the Cares River. After crossing the Puente Los Pinteros (bridge) outside of town, it dives into the spectacular *garganta* (gorge) cut by the river and continues from there on a trail carved into the sheer limestone face of the gorge high above the river. The first stretch crosses from one side of the ravine to the other and back again via a series of narrow bridges. In places the trail burrows right into the mountain through moist, echoing tunnels. On the final stretch, look for the ancient ruins at **Camarmeña**; from here the trail begins a moderate ascent up Los Callados, with wide views all the way back down to Puente Poncebos. This easy hike should take five hours each way.

Naranjo de Bulnes and **Torre Cerredo**: This moderately difficult route is the most common trail hikers and climbers take to reach the popular Naranjo de Bulnes (2,519-m/8,262-foot) peak (aka Pico Urrieullu), as well as the Torre Cerredo (2,648 m/8,685 feet), the highest summit in the Picos. The approximate nine-hour round-trip time does not include the time it will take for the climb itself. If you intend to climb the peak, plan on doing the hike the day before and call ahead from Sotres to reserve a room at the mountain refuge in the Vega de Urriellu at the base of the peaks. From the village of Sotres, follow the main road west from town and, at the curve, pick up the trailhead to the left. You'll be following a worn livestock trail most of the way. A steep ascent leads to the top of **Pandébano hill**, which offers the first views of Naranjo de Bulnes. The trail turns to the left and passes through the *vega* (meadow) of La Terenosa. At this point you'll pass by a mountain refuge and the last water fountain en route to the base of the Naranjo de Bulnes. From the meadow, the trail winds up and around a thick stand of trees to the top of **Vallejo hill**. The path then falls and enters a cirque filled with pebbly debris left by glaciers million of years before. A quasi-switchback is next, the most difficult part of the trail, before it opens out on the Vega del Urrieull with the mountain **Refugio de la Vega de Urriellu** *(☎ 98 594 50 24)*. All that is left are the imposing summits of Naranjo de Bulnes or Toree Cerredo.

For information and assistance in making the climb, go to adventure guide company **Casa Cipriano** *(☎ 98 594 50 24, www.casacipriano.com)* in Sotres. A climb to the summit, including a guide and equipment, takes two days and costs 150€. The company also has beds available in a nearby *casa rural*.

■ Eastern Massif (Macizo de Ándara)

The autonomous region of Cantabria claims most of the Eastern Massif. It is the smallest in area of the Picos massifs, with lower summits and slightly warmer and sunnier weather. Its three highest peaks are **Lechugales** (2,444 m/8,016 feet), **Sagrado Corazón** (2,212 m/7,255 feet) and **Pico Cortés** (2,370 m/7,774 feet). The Eastern Massif is separated from the massif of Urrieles by the Río Duje and from the smaller mountains of the Sierra de Peña Sagra to the east by the Liébana Valley and Río Deva. The valley is crowded with small villages that have sprung up due to the heavy mining industry in the area.

Potes

The main village of the Liébana Valley is Potes, a collection of brown stone and red tile homes on the Río Quiviesa that hasn't kept the valley's scrub and trees from growing up in and around it. Potes is a rough-hewn mining town turned tourist center with an old-world appeal. It is roughly five km (three miles) southeast of the Ándara Massif, situated on the N-621 road that runs along the eastern and southern boundaries of the park. There are two interesting medieval tower homes in the village and a quiet old quarter called La Solana that doesn't appear to have changed in 500 years. As a base camp, Potes is the Picos de Europa's eastern-side equivalent to Cangas de Onís in the west. For excursions into the nearby massif, no village in this valley is better equipped with accommodations, restaurants, adventures guides and the like. The **Oficina de Turismo** is located in the Parque Sabino Montes and only open in the summer.

Adventure Guides

Three companies in Potes offer a variety of sporting options in and around the Picos de Europa – **Europicos** *(C/ San Roque 6, ☎ 94 273 07 24, fax 94 273 20 60, www.euopicos.com)*, **La Liébana** *(C/ Independencia 4, ☎ 94 273 10 21, fax 94 273 10 00)* and **Picos Awentura** *(C/ Cervantes 3, ☎ 94 273 21 61, fax 94 273 21 45, www.cantabria.com/picosawentura)*. Each offers guides, equipment and advice for canyoning trips, horseback rides, 4x4 excursions, caving, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, paragliding and numerous other activities.

Sightseeing

Monasterio de Santo Toribio: The Bishop Toribio returned from Jerusalem in the sixth century to found this monastery west of Potes in the Liébana Valley. He purportedly carried with him the largest surviving piece of the Holy Cross *(Lignum Crucis)*, thus ensuring the site of Santa Toribio would be a very holy place indeed. The unpretentious church dates to the 14th century and is a blend of the Romanesque and Gothic styles. In an adjoining chapel, the relic is preserved in an ornate 14th-century gold reliquary. The monastery is open from 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-8 pm daily. From Potes take the C-621 west and just outside of town make the turn-off to the left. It's one kilometer down the winding road.

Adventures in the Air & on Foot

Though this is a short adventure in the air it is still longer than Orville and Wilbur Wright's first flight; once you've done it, any of a number of sporting opportunities are available. From Potes, head west on the C-621 to its dead-end at the small village of **Fuente Dé**, located in a cirque, source of the Río Deva. From here the **Teleférico cableway** launches tourists up 800 m (2,624 feet) in just over three minutes to the **Estación del Balcón**, a concrete *mirador* that overlooks the valley and cirque.

From the *mirador*, a **trail** begins that skirts the Ávila Passes. In less than two km (1.2 mile), the trail splits. Head left only if you have interest in climbing **Pico Tesorero** (2,570 m/7,273 feet). Take a right to reach the mountain ☆☆☆ **Refugio de Ávila** *(☎ 94 273 09 99)*, more a hotel than a run-down bunk spot. It is open from June 1 though September with well-furnished doubles costing 50€. After following the trail past the refuge, it splits a second time. The first trail that runs off to the right will reach Espinama on the same road you drove into Fuente Dé on. The second trail that cuts left runs as far as Sotres in the north valley between the Central and Eastern Massifs.

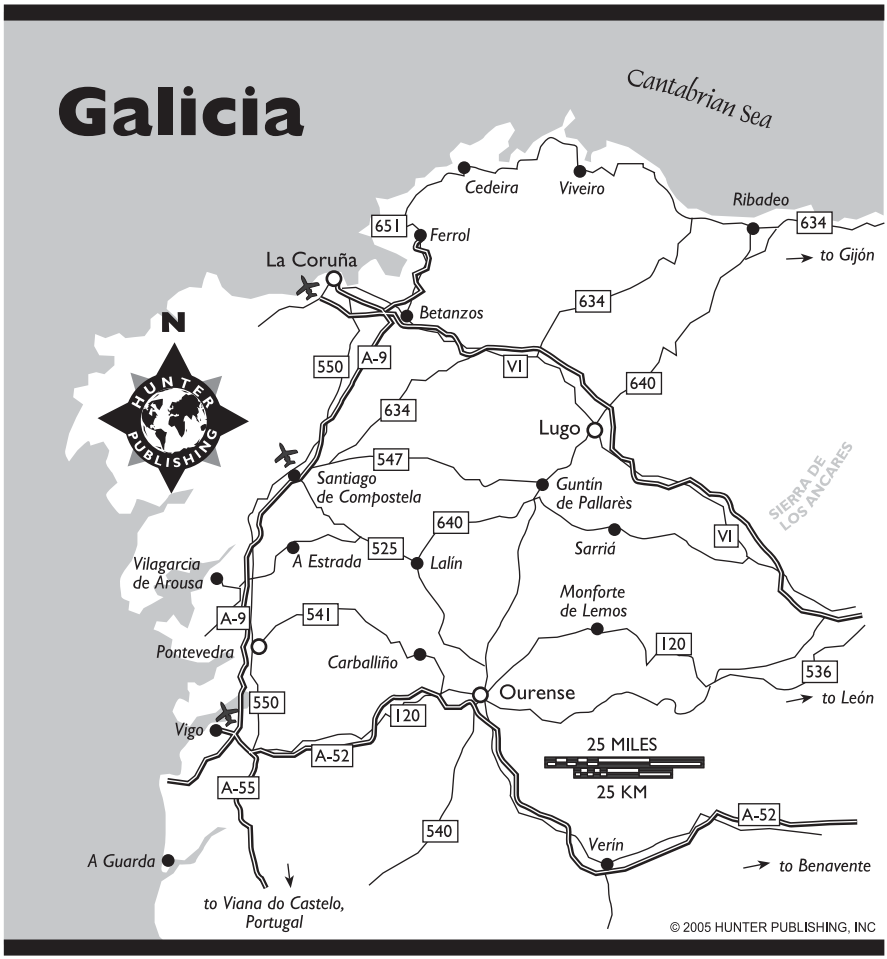
Plenty of **climbers** ride the *Teleférico* to begin the summit of one or another Eastern or Central Massif peak, the most popular being **Peña Vieja** (2,612 m/8,567 feet), **Pico Tesorero** (2,570 m/8,430 feet) and **Torre de Cerredo** (2,648 m/8,685 feet). **La Liébana** *(C/ Independencia 4, ☎ 94 273 10 21, fax 94 273 10 00)* in Potes can supply information, equipment and a guide for climbs in the area.

Adventures in the Air

Paragliders in the Picos favor the launching pad that shoots out over the Fuente Dé cirque. They use the cable car to reach it, just like you. **Europicos** *(C/ San Roque 6, ☎ 94 273 07 24, fax 94 273 20 60, www.europicos.com)* in Potes offers paragliding trips off the Fuente Dé in a two-seater (you and the guide). A flight costs 51€. The company is located on the ground floor of the Hotel Europicos.

Where to Stay & Eat

☆☆ **Hotel Picos de Valdecoro** *(C/ Roscabao 5, ☎ 94 273 00 25, d 50€)* is a new hotel on the fringes of town. Its style is in keeping with the traditional architecture, stony and rustic. Spacious double rooms are heated, with private bath, television and telephone. **Hostal Casa Cayo** *(C/ Cántabra 6, ☎ 94 273 01 50)* has plenty of character and a terrace that looks out on the river. A double with television and bath is 30-40€. **Tasca Cántabra** *(La Cántabra s/n, ☎ 94 273 07 14)* serves up the regional favorite *codido lebaniego* (a meaty stew with chickpeas and legumes) and a sweet baked lemon tart for dessert. For fresh trout or an affordable *menu del día*, try **El Cantón** *(C/ Obispo, ☎ 94 273 03 90)*. **Camping La Viorna** *(Ctra Santo Toribio, ☎ 94 273 21 01)* is west of the village on C-621 in the direction of the Monasterio de Santo Toribio. The campsite has enough facilities to keep Ivana Trump satisfied for at least a few hours. Charges are 8€ for a parcel, which includes an adult, car and tent. Each separately costs 2.81€.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540
Verín
A Guarda
to Benavente
to Viana do Castelo,
Portugal
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Galicia

Occupying its own corner in far northwestern Spain above Portugal, Galicia in topography resembles Ireland. It doesn't sound, smell or taste the same as what most have come to expect of Spain, either. The Gallegos are of Celtic origin – the name Galicia having been derived from Gallaeci, the Roman word for Celts. As if to debunk the charges that they inherited an introspective and aloof nature from their ancestors, the Gallegos strive to be courteous and friendly toward outsiders and come across sincerely in doing so. Though not always fair-skinned, they are dependably two shades lighter than an Andaluz from the south, play the bagpipes rather than the flamenco guitar and in certain communities believe in spirits as fervently as they do the Virgin Mary.

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Then there is the holy town of Santiago de Compostela, which for nine centuries has attracted pilgrims from the farthest reaches of Europe to its cathedral, said to shelter the remains of the Apostle St. James, Spain's patron saint and the reason that the country is Catholic. The numerous *caminos* followed by this pious and determined group blend into the Galician countryside like a natural feature, for the pilgrims arrive during the year as dependably as the rain.

It is said there are only 20 dry days a year in Galicia and a vibrant green roll of hills and estuaries are the result. Galicia shares its brisk, maritime climate with autonomous regions to the east – Asturias, Cantabria and País Vasco – together comprising what is referred to as Green Spain. For its part, Galicia is a shell of green overlying a harsh granite mass whose towns and cities reflect the predominance of this stone. The Celts were the first to effectively put the stone to extensive use after they crossed the Pyrenees and flooded into the region sometime around 600 BC. Excavations have revealed the foundations of their *castros*, which were fortified stone villages built around a circular core structure. Other architectural relics believed to have derived from the Celts stand today, as with the long stone granaries called *hórreos*, shown at left, that continue to puzzle the scholarly, and the round thatched roof cottages called *pallozas*, in some cases still inhabited by poor rural Gallegos.

Because of the longstanding poverty in the region, its population has aged considerably. Young, capable workers left Galicia long ago for Madrid, other Western European countries and the United States. The large Spanish population in New York was once comprised almost entirely of Gallegos.

The region's saving grace is its ports. Thirty million years ago the mountains sank, allowing the Atlantic Ocean to flow inward through what were then valleys. These natural inlets characterize the Galician coast, recognized as the wildest and one of the least developed in Spain with some of the country's

prettiest beaches. Known as *rías* and likened to fjords, they are surrounded by strands of eucalyptus and chestnut trees, with sand dunes in spots and fine sandy beaches in others. They make for perfect, sheltered harbors and to the last one are anchored by fleets of colorful fishing boats.

The seafood of Galicia is cherished throughout Spain and serves to bankroll the region's economy. Before there were trains or ice, enterprising Gallegos packed up their catch and used animals to haul it across the country to Madrid, at intervals stopping to ice the seafood down and keep it fresh using snow from the mountains along the route. A variety of fish, octopus and shellfish are the main culinary staples, prepared simply with oils and a couple of spices.

In 2002 a catastrophe befell the fishermen and the pristine coastal environment when the oil tanker *Prestige* approached the coast of Galicia with a damaged hull. Fearing the worst, the captain requested permission to bring the ship into port for repairs but was refused and turned away by the Spanish government. A few miles off the coast the *Prestige* split in two, spilling far more oil into the water than did the notorious yardstick for devastation that was the *Exxon-Valdez* in Alaska. The consequences were sickening and continue to wreak havoc on the wildlife off the Galician coast. Though the response was quick, the job of cleaning up the spill has been slow and in some cases ineffective. Almost two years later, crews dressed in white protective gear are still scattered along the coast, using high-pressure sprayers and, when that doesn't work, resorting to tooth brushes to scrape the smallest rocks of the oily muck. Fortunately, the disheartening new feature of the Galician coast, a perfect line of black along its rocky banks, is beginning to fade as life in the region returns to its distinct Spanish ways.

Santiago de Compostela

Trying to separate the fact from the fiction in storied Santiago de Compostela is part of its appeal. Stars and a clamshell symbolize this, Spain's most spiritual city, together relating a tale of the divine and the devoted that spans well over a thousand years. Santiago de Compostela has been, as it remains today, an extraordinary place since its founding. The patron saint of Spain, St. James the Apostle introduced Christianity to the country and subsequently returned to the Holy Land, where he was beheaded in 44 AD. Upon his death, a group of disciples are said to have brought the saint's remains back to Spain in a primitive boat, where they disembarked in the port of Padron, a small village west of Santiago. What became of his remains was a mystery for 800 years. Then, in 813, a hermit named Pelayo reportedly spied a strange constellation of stars low in the sky that led him to the discovery of the Apostle's sepulchre. The name "Compostela" is likely derived from either the Latin *campus stellae* or the Spanish *campo de estrella*, both of which mean "field of stars." A monastery was located over the remains and as word of the discovery spread across Europe the first pilgrims began the long march to pay homage to the saint. Santiago de Compostela became a polestar of Christendom and, thanks to its well-traveled Jacobean route, soon eclipsed Rome and the Holy Land in the number of devout it entertained each year.

During the Middle Ages as many as two million pilgrims made the journey annually. They wore short clothing, a cape, a wide-brimmed hat, carried a gourd for water and wine and a staff for walking and defense. The clamshell, which they wore on a string or embroidered in their clothing, was their passport to Santiago. The significance of the clamshell is another point of contention and catalyst of legend. The scalloped shell has been aligned with pagan mythology and legendary acts of the saint. One holds that he emerged from the ocean, covered in the shells, to save a disciple that had fallen overboard; another maintains that a pilgrim was swept out to sea and rescued by the saint, again covered with clamshells. Whatever the significance, and certainly the facts don't fit *all* the legends, the shells were common along the coastlines en route to Santiago and no doubt picked up by pilgrims along the way. With the shell a commoner was transformed into a pilgrim, could sleep and eat for free in monasteries and even ward off bandits – for it was considered a bad omen to rob a pilgrim. The Spanish government went so far as to declare it illegal to wear the clamshell off the Camino de Santiago and awarded a monopoly to Concheiras, a district in Santiago, to sell the metal imitations. Today the shell, carved in little stone markers and printed on metal signs, marks the *caminos* to Santiago at regular intervals. As with the stars, the scalloped shells are a beacon of piety. Without the legends, they would probably still just be lying on the coast.

■ Useful Information

Tourism Office

The **Xunta de Galicia Tourist Office** *(Rúa del Villar 43, ☎ 98 158 40 81)* was in the process of relocating nearer to the Catedral as of this writing. Directions to the new location should be posted outside the old. Otherwise, there is also a small municipal tourist kiosk in the Praza de Galicia (☎ *98 158 44 00*).

Internet

Nova 51 *(Rúa Nova 50, 55 98 156 01 00)* has plenty of computers upstairs and a quick connection. It is open until midnight.

■ Festivals

Santiago's greatest celebration takes place during the last two weeks of July with the annual **Día de la Patria Galega** (Galicia Day) and **Día del Apóstol Santiago** (Apostle St. James' Day). The action centers around the Praza do Obradoiro, Praza da Quintana and the Paseo de la Herradura, a mix of religious spectacle, musical events, plays, exhibitions and tee-totaling tomfoolery. The events culminate with a fireworks display in the Praza do Obradoiro on the night of the 24th, followed on the 25th by the religious ceremonies of St. James Day, including the **Ofrenda del Rey al Apóstol** *(*King's offering to the Apostle) and the eagerly awaited deployment of the massive censer Botafumeiro during mass. **La Ascensión**, which is held in either May or June, depending on the year, is a week-long street party that takes place in conjunction with the cattle fair.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: It's a short walk to the train station *(C/ Hórreo, ☎ 98 159 60 50)* from the Plaza de Galicia along Rúa do Horreo. Daily trains include: **Madrid** (up to two, eight hours); **La Coruña** (14, one hour); **Vigo** (11, two hours); **Ourense** (eight, 1½ hours); **León** (6½ hours); **Burgos** (eight hours); and **Bilbao** (11 hours).

By Bus: The Estación Autobuses *(C/ San Cayetano, ☎ 98 158 77 00)* is a 15-minute walk north of town, best approached from the Porta do Camiño. From it, follow Rúa de San Pedro. It curves around and becomes the Barrio dos Concheirs and then Rúa de Rodriguez before the station on the left. Bus number 10 runs to the station from Praza de Galicia. Frequent daily buses to other cities in Galicia are run by **Castromil** and include **La Coruña** (1½ hours); **El Ferrol** (two hours); **Vigo** (two hours); **Pontevedra** (1½ hours); and **Ourense** (two hours). Other buses run to **León** (five hours) and **Burgos** (seven hours). **Madrid** has four buses per day (nine-10 hours), while two to three run daily to cities in Asturias, Cantabria and the País Vasco.

By Car: The A-9 is the main highway in Galicia. It runs north from Portugal through Vigo and Pontevedra before reaching Santiago and then carries on to La Coruña and El Ferrol. From Madrid, take the N-VI northwest in the direction of La Coruña and once there, take the A-9 south.

■ Sightseeing

Santiago de Compostelo's old city, the **Casco Antiguo**, is one of the finest in all of Spain. For all touring purposes there is little reason to venture outside of it. Much of the architecture in the old city was resurfaced during the 17th and 18th century in the Baroque style. The busiest areas are in the squares around the Catedral, first constructed in the 11th century along with the three original streets adjoining it, **Rúa Nova**, **Rúa do Vilar** and **Rúa do Franco**. Befitting a city to which people arrive from thousands of miles away on foot, cars are restricted through most of the area (and would probably get stuck anyway). The sights, smells and stories are all in and around this neighborhood, scattered among cobblestone streets spreading out from the Catedral as far as the trace of the former medieval walls.

Before the Catedral

Surrounded by regal buildings on all four sides, the **Praza de Obradoiro** marks the final steps of the pilgrim and the point from which the town of Santiago de Compostela expanded during the years following the discovery of the sepulchre of the Apostle. The Praza is named for a workshop that occupied the space between 1738 and 1747; here the granite stones were carved for the new Baroque façade of the Catedral to replace the earlier Romanesque façade. With its two Baroque towers mottled in gray and splotches of yellow moss, the Catedral looms commandingly over the plaza. Adjoining it to the left is the **Palacio de Xelmírez** *(open 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, entry 1.50€)*, a stark 12th-century palace that retains the Romanesque design it once shared with the Catedral.

Directly across the Praza from the Catedral is the Neoclassical **Pazo de Raxoi**, built in 1772 as a confessor's seminary and residence for choirboys and now site of the town hall. The bas-relief depicts the Battle of Clavijo with

Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor Slayer). Historians doubt whether the battle of 844 – in which Santiago reincarnate is said to have inspired Christians in the struggles with the infidels by dispatching a Moorish troop – ever took place. Facing the Catedral, **El Colegio de San Jerónimo** is to the right, founded in 1501 and with a façade borrowed from the oldest pilgrim's hospital, formerly located behind the Catedral in the Praza de Inmaculada. Opposite it is the **Antiguo Hospital Real**, a plain rectangular edifice of two stories embellished with an elaborate plateresque doorway. The hospital was established by the Catholic monarchs in the 16th century to house and treat sick pilgrims and is now a Parador de Turismo, the Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos.

Behind the Catedral

Pass between the Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos and the Palacio de Xelmírez on Rúa de San Francisco to reach a series of *prazas* along the backside of the Catedral. The first, **Praza do Inmaculada** faces the north façade of the Catedral from the colossal Monasterio de San Martín Pinario. It is commonly referred to as the Praza de Azabachería for the craftsmen of the jet-stone (*azabache*) guild that once gathered here to make rosaries for sale to pilgrims. The 20,000-square-foot monastery was built in the 17th century on the site of a no doubt smaller 10th-century monastery and now serves as a student dormitory. Its 16th-century Baroque church is around the far side past the Romanesque cloisters, complete with incomplete towers, construction of which was allegedly halted when church patrons complained that they might overshadow the Catedral's own towers.

Continuing around to the eastern side of the Catedral is the **Praza de Quintana**, a former cemetery with a surprisingly upbeat appeal despite its metaphysical division between the living (the top of the square, known as La Quintana de Vivos) and the dead (the lower half, La Quintana de Muertos). Hovering over the square is the **Torre de la Trinidad**, the city's clock tower with the emblematic bell, La Berenguela. Originally built in the 14th century, the tower was reworked in the 18th century in a Baroque vein.

The Catedral's **Puerta Santa** (Holy Gate) opens on to this plaza, but only during a holy year, when the feast day of Santiago, July 25th, falls on a Sunday. The gate is, not surprisingly, Baroque, but decorated with Romanesque sculptures taken from the old choir. From the living part of the square, **Casa de la Parra** faces **Casa de Canga**; both mansions were built around the turn of the 18th century. Between them and opposite the Catedral is the **Iglesia y Convento de San Paio**, founded in 1707 and with a Roman altar stone used by the earliest disciples of the Apostle.

On to the last square, the **Praza das Praterías** (Square of the Silversmiths) preserves the only Romanesque façade and portal of the original Catedral.

"Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gauge,
And thus I'll make my pilgrimage."
Sir Walter Raleigh

La Catedral

On the 25th of July, 813, the sepulcher of the Apostle St. James was discovered near this site in the village of San Fiz de Solovio. King Alfonso II promptly ordered a monastery built to honor the saint who had been beheaded in 44 AD in Palestine. With the spread of the news and the ongoing battles with the Moors, Santiago de Compostelo soon became a rallying point for Christianity in Spain and well beyond. Under Alfonso III, a grandiose basilica replaced the modest monastery, only to be destroyed when the Moorish ruler Almanzor sacked the town in 997. The Baroque shell of the Catedral that stands today conceals much of the original Romanesque exterior begun in 1075; for the most part, the interior maintains its Romanesque design.

The main entrance is off the Praza do Obradoiro through the Pórtico de la Gloria, left, a mind-boggling Romanesque jewel sculpted by Maestro Mateo in 1188. The portal is highlighted by a large archway divided by a mullion and flanked by two smaller archways, together bearing 200 realistically carved biblical figures. Beneath the central arch is the largest sculpture – that of Christ with the four evangelists seated in twos on either side of Him. Equally compelling are the 24 old men of the Apocalypse that seem to defy gravity as they play instruments side-by-side along the arc above Christ. In the center mullion, just beneath Christ, is the Apostle St. James. Beneath the Apostle, look for the worn area that is ritually touched by pilgrims prior to entering the Catedral. The side arches depict prophets and scenes from the Old Testament on the left and monsters dining on sinners in a rendition of the Last Judgment on the right. On the backside of the mullion, take note of the so-called Santo dos Croques (Saint of the Bumps), a stone rendition of Maestro Mateo said to bestow wisdom on any who bump their heads against it.

The central nave, with its vaulted Romanesque ceiling looking as old as it should, leads directly to the garish but nonetheless astoundingly ornamented Baroque main altar; before this dizzying array of golden filigree and cherubs topped by the sculpture of St. James the Moor Slayer the fantastical *botafumeiro* hangs a giant censer 1½ meters (five feet) high and weighing 50 kilograms (110 lbs). During special ceremonies eight men known as *Tiraboleiros* are required to swing it in a great arc across the transept, showering the Catedral with incense and glowing embers.

The Romanesque statue of St. James set behind the altar, shown at right, is the show-stopper. Their arduous journey almost complete, pilgrims traditionally file up the steps and around behind the statue, give it an embrace and breathe a sigh of relief. Stairs lead down to the elaborate silver tomb sheltering the remains of the Apostle directly under foot. Ironically, the relics of the Apostle were lost again after they were hidden from the marauding Sir Francis Drake in 1589. A historian recovered them in the 19th century.

The **Museo y Tesoro de La Catedral's** motley collection is spread between the Catedral's *cripta* (crypt), *tesoro* (treasury) and rooms off the *claustro* (cloister). The main exhibition spaces of the cloister are accessed from the Praza do Obradoiro. Inside, there seems to be a concerted effort to diagram and explain the processes behind the various construction and reconstruction phases the Catedral has undergone.

One room is given over to a scale reproduction of the Catedral's original stone *coro*, an immaculate piece of craftsmanship by Maestro Mateo that was needlessly destroyed to make way for a wood *coro* that itself would eventually be removed. Ah the travesty. A wealth of 16th- and 17th-century tapestries attributed to the Flemish, French and Spanish crafters (along with a few machines) are on display.

The library houses the *botafumeiro*, that massive and intimidating censer, as well as the 12th-century Codex Calixtinus, a detailed log of the Camino de Santiago by the Frenchman Aymeric Picaud and credited as the world's first guidebook. Various Romanesque sculptures and tombs have been culled from discoveries in the Catedral's crypt, a beautiful barrel-vaulted church which is accessed directly beneath the front steps of the Catedral. *(☎ 98 156 15 27, open summers 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-7:30 pm, winters 10 am-1:30 pm and 4-6:30 pm; entry 5€ includes access to each of the spaces.)*

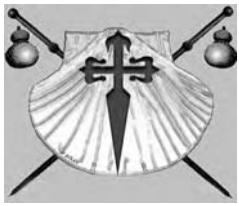
Museums & Galleries

Built between the 14th and 17th centuries, the **Convento de Santo Domingo de Bonaval** now houses the **Museo do Pobo Galego**, dedicated to all things Galician past and present. Withstanding the exhibitions, the convent itself is attractive enough to warrant a peek. With models and various relics, the museum space delves into the fishing and shipbuilding industry in the region, the *gaiti* – a smaller version of Scottish bagpipes – and those traditional round houses with thatched roofs that look straight out of a Smurf's cartoon. There is also a pantheon with the remains of notable Gallegos *(☎ 98 158 36 20, open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 4-7 pm, free entry).*

The **Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea** is next door in an appropriately sleek, contemporary building designed in 1993 by the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza. Though it has no permanent exhibit, there is usually one or another interesting show of contemporary art. Stop by, watch for fliers in town or check at the tourism office to see what's on *(Rúa Ramón del*

Valle-Inclán, ☎ 98 154 66 19, open Tues.-Sat 10 am-1 pm & 4 pm-8 pm, Sun 10 am-1 pm, free entry.)

■ Adventures on Foot



Blisters be damned, the **Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela** is one of the holiest acts in Christendom and, apart from martyrdom, one of its most hellish. As I write, a good friend of mine is walking the **Camino de Santiago**, an adventure for which unforeseeable setbacks precluded my involvement. Writing, for once, seems the lesser of two evils. Through regular reports (he is, not surprisingly, rather lonely at times) I've learned that it took less than two weeks for his Teva sandals to blow out; he's gone through four tubes of sunscreen (his hair, which was brown, is now blond) and burned off 15 pounds. When he called two days ago to report that he'd just passed the halfway point, all but one pair of shorts and a few shirts had been sacrificed to the trash man and, after a run-in with a pair of wily canines, he had decided to acquire a staff like the rest of the pilgrims.

His chosen route is along the French Road, the most popular *camino* for the wealth of monuments and extensive pilgrim infrastructure along the way. It enters Spain from France through either Roncesvalles or Somport, passes through the regions of Navarra and La Rioja, then skirts the southern base of the Cordillera Cantabrica through Castilla y León all the way to Galicia. The northern route, one of the many alternatives, begins in the País Vasco. It then runs west through the rugged lands sandwiched between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Atlantic Coast; it had fallen into disuse until recently.

The reports continue: an average of 25 km (15 miles) logged a day; nights spent in monasteries for free and hostels for a cut-rate in the cities along the way; departure each morning with a new stamp marking the progress. When he's finally reached Santiago de Compostela (it should take him five weeks in all) and kissed the stony head of the Apostle St. James, he'll report to the **Oficina de Acogida del Peregrino** in the Casa del Deán *(Rúa Vilar 1, ☎ 98 156 24 19)*, where he'll present his stamps and receive La Compostela, an official document certifying his accomplishment. In fact, to receive La Compostela, one need only have traveled 100 km (62 miles) afoot or on horseback or 150 km (90 miles) on a bike. It should come as a shock to his parents when they see his new tattoo: a *veira*, the scalloped shell emblematic of the Camino de Santiago.

FRANK THE PILGRIM

The story is Frank's, as told to me in the broken English of this German, who had lost his job some months before and, finding himself at a loss as for what to do in this world, read a newspaper article about a man who, in a similar predicament, had just started walking.

With nothing but disappointment confronting him at home, Frank decided to do the same, to just start walking – with no maps, guide-

books and hardly any money. He said goodbye to his German life and he began to walk, in the general direction of Santiago de Compostela.

I met Frank after I had walked almost 370 miles as a pilgrim. I was at a point in the pilgrimage when I had begun to feel worthy, even righteous. But then I met Frank, and no other person could have done a better job of putting me in my place.

He told me that, in the first 1,500 miles of his walk he had slept in a bed only twice; that he had budgeted what little money he had and it amounted to six euros per day, enough for food but not quite enough for a bed. From East Germany he had walked through the Czech Republic, down through Austria, Switzerland and into France, where he then had to cross the Pyrenees before entering Spain.

"Are you excited," I asked him, "Because your journey is almost complete?"

"No," he said.

"How could you not be?"

"What I mean is, No, it is not almost complete."

"But Santiago is just 12 days away, and you have been walking since early March, over three months. How could you not be excited?"

"Because I don't stop in Santiago," he said, "I go on to Lisbon, to see what it is like, too."

"Was it a problem," I asked, my final question, "walking all this way alone?" Frank stopped walking, looked at me, his eyes weary, but creased around the lids so as to give the impression of a permanent happiness.

"Sometimes," he said, "a problem makes you better."

Before setting off for yourself, contact the Oficina de Acogida del Peregrino, which can provide copious information about the routes as well as personal guides. There are a number of books describing the Camino de Santiago available in all major bookstores.

The **Museo das Pergrinacións** in Santiago de Compostela houses a large collection of relics pertaining to the Camino de Santiago, including sculptures, paintings, metallurgy and local handicrafts *(Rúa San Miguel 4, ☎ 98 158 15 58, open Tues.-Fri. 10 am-10 pm, Sat. 10:30 am-1:30 pm and 5-8 pm, Sun. 10:30 am-1:30 pm)*.

To stretch the legs, the **Parque Carballeira de Santa Susana** next to the Casco Antiguo is a busy park with manicured gardens, plenty of oak trees and occasionally a jogger or two. Atop the center hill is the **Iglesia de Santa Susana**, co-patron saint of Santiago. Behind it, steps lead up to the **Paseo da Ferradura** and a lookout point over the Colegio de San Clemente and the city.

Choosing the Right Camino

"There are very few real pilgrims walking the Camino de Santiago these days," a man from Madrid told me as we walked our last few steps toward Santiago de Compostela, each of us giddy with the long-awaited view of the Cathedral spires on the horizon, beneath which lay the relics of the Apostle St. James, or Santiago as the Spaniards know him.

After having biked to Santiago three times previously, this was the man's first time afoot on the Camino Frances, the busiest of the four main routes that cross Spain to reach the holy city. I'd seen little of the French Route (the Ruta de la Costa, or coastal route, which I'd chosen to walk for a number of reasons joined up with this route on the homestretch, two days out from Santiago). But two days had been enough: the hundreds, even thousands of pilgrims encountered every day; the race to secure beds in the pilgrims' hostels each day; the pilgrims who would wake up at 3:30 am and walk hours through the dark just to reach the next hostel before the others.

It was a holy year, or *Jacobea*, and there wouldn't be another one until 2010 (when the Apostle's birthday, July 25th, falls on a Sunday), which must have accounted for some of the crowds and the madness along the French Route. Still, I couldn't help but be thankful for having chosen one of the lesser-known routes, and for having walked 500 miles as a 'real' pilgrim; that is, one who was in it for the right reasons, who didn't cheat along the way or walk only the minimum 62 miles required to receive the pilgrim's passport, a certificate of accomplishment known as the *Compostela*.

For having chosen to walk the Ruta de la Costa – which roughly traces the northern Spanish coast across Green Spain, through the regions of the País Vasco, Cantabria, Asturias and finally, Galicia – I'd enjoyed cool, crisp ocean views and the verdant landscape of Spain's rainiest parts, while those on the French Route endured blisteringly hot and dry summer days on Spain's mostly flat, central plateau. For the first three weeks, until the pilgrims increased in number nearing Santiago de Compostela, I had been able to walk mostly alone, with nothing more than my thoughts and a myriad of physical pains to remind me that I was, in fact, a 'real' pilgrim.

The route I'd spent 28 days walking had its downsides: signposting was often non-existent, which meant hours of walking with only the faith that the right way had been chosen (more often than not, it was the wrong way, leaving no choice but to backtrack for hours); at times the predominant forest trails were obscured with thorns and underbrush, or muddy and stinky with fresh cow manure; some days I'd had to walk along the shoulder of busy highways; and almost every day there would be mountains to hike up, then back down.

Along the way, I'd enjoyed countless conversations with pilgrims from throughout the world, many of whom were just as opinion-

ated as the man I'd talked with on final approach to Santiago; the man who had felt there are few 'real' pilgrims these days. In the years before, many I talked with had walked the other routes: the French Route, the Portuguese Route, or the Silver Route up from Andalucía, through Extremadura and Castilla y León, which took roughly 40 days to complete. Others had begun in their respective European countries and walked thousands of miles farther than I had.

In the end, I sat in the plaza before the Cathedral of Santiago – anticipating the grand music and fireworks spectacle in honor of the Apostle's Birthday – with a crowd of over 30,000 people, including the King and Queen of Spain. I realized then that we were all 'real' pilgrims, if only because we'd each chosen to become one, for however long, for whatever reasons.

■ Nightlife

To find out the current line-up of cultural events in town, pick up the *Compostela Capital*, a monthly listing printed in Spanish by the tourism office. The city's **Teatro Principal** *(Rúa Nova 21, ☎ 98 158 65 55)* hosts a smorgasbord of acts, including opera, theater, dance and musical performances. Another performance venue is the **Auditorio de Galicia** *(Palacio de la Ópera, Exposiciones y Congresos, Avda do Burgo das Nacions, ☎ 98 157 10 26)*, home to the Galicia Symphony Orchestra. The **Parque de la Música** adjoining it is a relaxing green area with a small artificial pond.

Outside the old city, **Praza Roxa** is the hub of Santiago's modern commercial district with plenty of shops and a festive nightlife. Fashionable boutiques line the **Rúa de República Argentina** and **Rúa de Senra**. A number of bars and discos are located in the streets around the plaza and most commonly frequented by university students. Small bars are scattered throughout the old city and usually don't stay open past 3 am. Some areas worth a look are along **Rúa Franco**, **San Paio de Antealteares** and **Virxe da Cerca**.

■ Where to Stay

In the **Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos** *(Plaza del Obradoiro 1, ☎ 98 158 22 00, fax 98 156 30 94, Santiago@parador.es, d 166.50€)* you can sleep like a king and lament the days when Pilgrims once lodged here for free. Its history dates back to the end of the 15th century, when the Catholic monarchs established this building next to the Catedral as a hospice for pilgrims. Today it is reputed as the most elegant *parador* Spain has on offer. Rooms are lavishly appointed with antiques dating to the founding of the hospital, with plush rugs laid out on the floors and tapestries hung from the walls. The hostel has four large

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price of a two-person room.	
$	under US$50
$$	US$50-$100
$$$	US$101-$150
$$$$	US$150-$200
$$$$$	over US$200

cloisters and a dining room that stretches on and on beneath a series of stone archways. Even if the hostel is full, which it quite often is, it's worth making dinner reservations at its exceptional restaurant.

Hotel As Artes *(Traviesa de Dos Puertas 2, ☎ 98 157 25 90, fax 98 157 78 23, recepcion@asartes.com, d 65-80€)* is around the back from the Hostal de Los Reyes Católicos. What this hotel lacks in classicism it makes up for with reasonable prices, a good location and comfortable, modern rooms.

Pousadas de Compostela *(☎ 98 156 93 50, fax 98 158 69 25, pousadas@jet.es)* runs three hotels in the historical center of Santiago that are a stylish mix of the traditional spaces in very old places (read: centuries-old stone walls and archways) and modern accents. Not all the rooms, mind you, are as stylish as others. And, as these are small hotels, they lack the feeling of openness afforded by a grand, perhaps modern hotel outside the historical center. Have a look at more than one.

Hotel Virxe da Cerca (C/ Virxe *de Cerca 27, d 96€-108€)* was originally a 17th-century Jewish residence. Rooms are comfortable with new bathroom installations and small balconies that overlook either the Parque de Belvis or the city's produce market.

Hotel San Clemente *(C/ San Clemente 28, d 80-90€)* occupies a building listed as a historical/artistic site by the local government. The reception area is small and the rooms are about the same, though they're sleek and modern with deep wood floors and sharp bathrooms. It's roughly 150 m (420 feet) from the Catedral. The **Hotel Airas Nunes** *(Rúa San Clemente 28, d 90€)* is closer. Its rooms sport mellow stucco walls with brick accents, bright linens and walnut furniture. A fine interior decorator saw to the task. Pilgrims often pass by just outside the windows on the final leg to the Catedral. **Hostal Alameda** *(Rúa San Clemente 32, ☎ 98 158 81 00, fax 98 158 86 89, www.archy.com/hostalalameda, d 33-42€)* occupies a newer, bright white building across the street from the historical center on the side nearest the Catedral. Don't be dissuaded by the 1970s-style brown vinyl living room set in the lobby. The rooms, while not hip or trendy, are clean and well maintained, with solid wood floors, television and full baths. If possible, opt for one of the exterior rooms with sunnier views; the interior rooms look onto a simple courtyard but are quieter.

Libredón Hostal *(Praza de Fonseca 5, ☎ 98 157 65 20, fax 98 158 41 33)* is in the Praza de Fonseca next to the main Praza do Obradoiro, and as a result, charges a premium for its modest rooms with private bath. Doubles are42-48€.

Hostal Suso *(Rúa do Villar 65, ☎ 98 158 66 11, d 30-36€)* has nine simple rooms often occupied by pilgrims during the high season. Each is comfortable and clean with television and bath en suite. The hostel is run in conjunction with the popular café/bar downstairs.

■ What to Eat & Where

Attractive young ladies offer free samples outside many confectionaries; iced display cases are heaped with the day's catch in almost every restaurant window; menus of the day are cheap and uncommonly fresh (once you get off the tourist trek of Rúa Franco). More than one person has fallen in love with Santiago de Compostelo for the food. Galician cuisine is elemental but rich; it is known throughout Spain, a

country surrounded by the sea, for serving the finest seafood of all the regions. I have eaten *pulpo Gallego*, that emblematic dish of octopus, olive oil, salt and paprika, on the beach at a *chiringuito* in Andalucía, in a local corner bar in Madrid, and at a renowned seafood restaurant in Barcelona, but I've never had it so good as in Santiago de Compostela. Clams are common in the region, as are corn *empanadas* stuffed with tuna and octopus. Most meals begin with a hot bowl of *caldo Gallego*, a seafood soup, and end with the *tarta de almendras de Santiago*, a heavy sweet cake sprinkled with powdered sugar.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Reflects the average price for one dinner entrée.	
$	under US$10
$$	US$10-$15
$$$	US$15-$25
$$$$	US$26-$35
$$$$$	over US$35

Restaurante Libredón *(lunch is served from 1-3:30 pm and dinner from 8:30 -11 pm)*, in the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos, is as majestic a place to dine as you'll come across in Galicia and perhaps even Spain. Two seemingly endless rows of tables line this stony medieval chamber; the waitstaff is friendly, professional and can speak more than a few words of English and the cuisine is as should be expected of a *parador* restaurant, following the local culinary tradition and exquisitely prepared. The wines of the Briberies and Albariños top the list and dinner choices include seafood and, well, seafood. Some things to try include the latest take on *merluza* (hake), sardines and *pulpo* (octopus).

Mesón Enxebre *($$, Plaza del Obradoiro 1, ☎ 98 158 22 00)* is the Hostal de los Reyes Católicos' reasonable alternative to its pricey Restaurante Libredón. This modernized rendition of a Galician tavern offers an affordable menu of the day full of regional specialties and on a good night it hosts a small and entertaining string band. It's an ideal place to sample *tapas* in a city not known for them.

O Asesino *($$, Praza de Universidade 16, ☎ 98 158 15 62)* is a laid-back classic of down-home Galician cooking across from the university. Dispel any fears you may have about this place, the name comes from an incident years ago when a chef raced out of the kitchen brandishing a knife when a live chicken that had escaped the cooker and seemed hell-bent on escaping the restaurant. A group of youngsters were eating at the time and began to yell "murder! murder!" Hence the name and a reputation that has drawn such notables as the intellectual Miguel de Unamuno and the playwright Valle Inclán. The *empanada Gallega* (which you will find cheap variations of vacuum-sealed in gas stations throughout Spain) is the pride of the house, along with the *caldo Gallego* (Galician soup) and *almejas en salsa* (sauced clams).

Café Carigolo *($, Rúa de Algalia de Arriba 38, ☎ 98 158 34 15)* is a cultural dive, with poetry readings and live music in the evenings. The menu is slight and comes second to socializing, cigarettes and coffee sipping.

To save a few bucks, the city's **Mercado** on Rúa de Santo Agostiño is an entertaining place to fill the grocery sacks with fresh food for later.

Pontevedra

There is nothing more important in Pontevedra than passing time in the cool shade of the old quarter doing nothing in particular. For most of the day, the mangy dog resting its haunches on its owner's doorstep on Calle San Xulián sees little action. The Spanish siesta that usually slows things down from 2 in the afternoon until 5 seems to carry on all day with minimal interruption until night revives the area of Las Cinco Calles. In the mornings rural farmers from nearby *pueblos* tramp heavily on the cobblestones, burdened with produce from their small *huertas* and dairy products from their fat cows and bleating goats. For a few hours the Praza do Teucro comes alive with the sounds and smells of their farmer's market; then things get quiet, back to normal again. In the afternoon a group of locals puts a card table up in the Praza da Verdura, a few streets over, and shares from a *jarra* of red wine, offering a glass to a tourist straggling by who's wondering what to do here.

■ Useful Information

The **tourist office** is a little way down the Alameda promenade stretching out from the Praza de España before the *Ayuntamiento (C/ del General Mola 3, ☎ 98 685 0814)*. A tourist kiosk is occasionally open in the Praza de España.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación de Tren *(☎ 98 685 13 13)* is next to the bus station southwest of town off C/ Calvo Sotelo. At least 15 trains per day depart for **Santiago** (1½ hours), **La Coruña** (three hours) and **Vigo** (30 minutes). Two trains per day run to **Madrid** (1½ hours).

By Bus: The Estación de Autobuses *(☎ 98 685 24 08)* is off C/ Calvo Sotelo, a 10-minute walk southwest of town. Some 15-20 buses run per day to **Santiago de Compostela** (1½ hours), **La Coruña** (2½ hours) and **Vigo** (30 minutes). Five or more buses run per day to **Madrid** (nine hours).

By Car: The A-9/E-1 runs north up the Galician coast from Vigo to Pontevedra, Santiago de Compostela and La Coruña. From Ourense take the N-120 west and eight km (4.8 miles) outside of town pick up the N-541 in the direction of Pontevedra. From Madrid the quickest way is on the A-6/N-6 in the direction of La Coruña. At Benavente exit onto the N-525 west.

■ Sightseeing

The **Praza da Peregrina** is a good place to start, wedged between the old quarter and the newer pedestrian shopping zone. The latter is a pleasant set of streets surrounding the old quarter on the side not claimed by the Río Lérez snaking inland from the Ría de Pontevedra. The city once had a prosperous port in its *ría* (or fjord-like cove); its old quarter, which has since lost its walls, and many of its monuments date from the 13th to 16th century. The plaza is named for the pilgrims that cross the region towards Santiago de Compostela, as emblematic a feature of the Galician landscape as the grain-storing *hórreos*, the thatched-roofed *pallozas* and the twill of bagpipes. Pilgrims have long attached the scalloped shells common on the Galician coast to their clothing as a way of identifying their cause and proving its completion. In Pontevedra, the scalloped shell is a

frequently invoked decorative motif. The center of this plaza is highlighted by the Baroque 18th-century **Santuario de la Virgen Peregrina** church, built on a ground plan shaped like a scallop shell.

The **Casa Alcade Café** next to the church has an elevated terrace perfect for surveying the busy plaza over a Mediterranean salad and a glass of the region's favored white wine, Ribeiro. A plaque on the wall tells of the Pontevedres historian D. Claudío Gonzalez Zuñiga who lived in this former home from 1784-1857.

The history of Pontevedra grew dim in the 17th century. The city was founded by the Romans, who called it Pontis Veteris, though Celtiberian tribes and Phoenician and Greek merchants are known to have frequented the area previously. During the Middle Ages the port earned the city a privileged position in the region. Columbus' ship, the *Santa María*, was built in its harbor and Pontevedra was recognized as Galicia's largest city. The **Basílica de Santa María**, on the opposite side of the old quarter in the Praza de Alonso de Fonseco, stands as a legacy of that period. The honey-colored granite of this church is accentuated by a delicate plateresque façade and sculpture of the crucifix. It was built in the 16th century, not long before the river began to silt in heavily and Pontevedra's glory days drew to a close.

Across the Praza da Peregrina is the **Convento de San Francisco**, a 13th-century Gothic construction separated from the popular **Praza da Ferrería** by a small garden. In this plaza old men snore on benches while children chase after pigeons or beg their parents to buy them an ice cream from the *heladería* stand. This is the largest and busiest plaza in the old quarter with plenty of tables set out by the surrounding restaurants during the lunch and dinner hour.

Pass through the tables of the small Praza de Estrela adjoining the larger plaza and under the wooden balconies of Calle Figueroa to the **Praz da Leña**. The *cruceiro* in the center of this holy, homely plaza is a common sight in Galicia, meant to signify gratitude or misfortune depending on the location, but practically used to designate meeting points. Facing this colonnaded square are two 18th-century Baroque palaces, now conjoined to serve as part of the **Museo Provincial** *(C/ Pasantería 10, open winters Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1:30 pm and 4:30-8 pm, summers 10 am-2:15 pm and 5-8:45 pm, Sun. 11 am-1 pm).* The collection inside paints a picture of Galician crafts through the ages; jewelry, religious sculpture and jet-stone trinkets carved in a variety of shapes, including that of the scallop shell that symbolically binds Pontevedra with the rest of the region.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

The evocative **Parador Nacional Casa del Barón** *(C Barón 19, ☎ 98 685 58 00, fax 98 685 21 95, pontevedra@parador.es, d 80€)* is a tourist sight in and of itself. This sumptuous state-run hotel is one of approximately 600 *pazos* scattered across Galicia. The *pazo* was a typical stone manor that came into favor in the region during the Middle Ages, usually Baroque in styling with a small chapel, garden and *hórreo* (granary). This particular *pazo* was built in the 16th and 17th centuries for the influential Maceda family and has alternately served as a school and a salt mill. Established in 1955 as a *parador*, the hotel has recently undergone a renovation but still looks as it was intended to look. The *parador's* restau-

rant isn't as reputable as others in its chain, but nonetheless serves competent regional cuisine.

☆ **Hotel Comercio** *(Avda González Besada 3, ☎ 98 685 12 17, d 40€)* makes up for the shortage of budget hostels in Pontevedra with affordable rooms. The hotel is a five-minute walk south from the old quarter in the busy shopping and commercial district. While not elegant or stylish, the rooms are well-made and comfortable, with television and private bath. The downstairs restaurant serves good coffee and has a decent assortment of *tapas* and a crew of rowdy middle-aged men during *fútbol* season.

Hotel Comercio's main competition is just around the corner, **Hostal-Residencia Mexico** *(C/ Andrés Muruais 8, ☎ 98 685 90 06, d 45€).* The interior is not nearly as festive as the sign outside and the prices are on average 5€ higher than Comercio. The rooms, though slightly dim, are comparable to those of its neighbor.

O'Merlo *($$, Avda Sta. María 4, ☎ 98 684 43 43)* displays possibly the largest collection of key chains in the world. They're everywhere. Strange décor, but a well-respected restaurant and *tapas* bar serving seafood salads, *pulpo*, quail and pork loin with a flair.

The **Casa Alcalde Café** *($$, Plaza da Peregrina)*, mentioned above, is a *taberna* with a classy inner ambiance and a great outdoor terrace. The menu is creative Spanish/Italian with a penchant for seafood. **Bun Burguer** *(C/ Peregrina 40)*, for those of us who are monetarily challenged, serves a killer burger stacked to the ceiling with fried egg and vegetables.

The Rías Bajas (Rías Baixas)

Galicia's coastline is the wildest in Spain due to the precipitous granite crags thrusting into the Atlantic Ocean and a preponderance of unique *rías* allowing the seawater to flow inland. There are over 15 of these lush, fjord-like inlets along the coast; around them a sprinkling of islands indicates the peaks of mountains submerged over 30 million years ago. These *rías* range from the widest ones in the south, known as the Rías Bajas that thrust far inland creating sizable peninsulas in between, to the *rías* of the north, called the Rías Altas, markedly smaller, tamer in appearance and less populated.

■ Bayona

The Rías Bajas begin in the south, just above Portugal in Bayona (Baiona), once a leading medieval port town and now a busy summer tourist resort. In 1493 Columbus's caravel *La Pinta* landed in Bayona with the first report of the newly discovered continent. A replica of the ship is moored in Bayona's harbor. The seafront promenade, colonnaded streets and the Monte Real of Bayona make for a pleasant walk.

Useful Information

The **Oficina Municipal de Turismo** *(El Paseo de Ribeira, ☎ 98 668 70 67, www.baiona.org)* is open May through September. For tourist information the rest of the year, head to the *Ayuntamiento* or town hall *(C/ Lorenzo de la Carrera 17, ☎ 98 638 50 50)*.

Getting Here & Around

There are **bus stops** on the Paseo de Ribeira and on C/ Sabarís and departures for Vigo via ATSA buses *(☎ 98 661 02 55)* every half-hour until 10 pm.

Mar de Ons *(☎ 98 638 50 55)* operates boat tours of the *ría* and to the Islas Cíes.

Adventures on Water

The coast between Bayona and Vigo fronts a variety of beaches. On the diminutive Ría de Baiona, **Praia América** is the most popular with tourists and offers nice views of the Isles Cíes off the Ría de Vigo. Farther north, another beach stands out in the opinion of surfers. **Praia Patos**, with fine white sand and large swells, is northwest of the town of Panxón on the northern arc of the Punta Lameda. You'll find plenty of surfshops nearby to rent boards. **Praia Samil** is more than a kilometer long and over-developed as far as Galician coasts go. Approaching Vigo west from the town of Alcabre is **Praia A Fonte**, a secluded beach nestled in a small inlet.

Where to Stay

The Monte Real is a wooded hill topped by **Conde de Gondomar**, a 16th-century fortress now used as the state-run *parador* **Hotel Pazo de Mendoza** *(MonteReal, ☎ 98 635 59 99, fax 98 635 50 76, baiona@parador.es)*, with exceptional views of the ocean and the tiny Islas Estelas across the bay. The crowded Barbeira beach is set at the foot of the *parador* between its walls and the yacht harbor.

The **Hotel Anunciada** *(C/ Ventura Misa 58, ☎ 98 635 55 90, d 35€)* is a little drab but ideally located in the center of town. For hotel-quality rooms with private bath and the essential amenities, it's quite affordable.

Camping Bayona Playa *(Playa Ladeira-Sabaris-Bayona, ☎ 98 635 00 35, www.mtmt.com/campingbayona, campingbayona@bme.es)* is a huge campsite on the stretch of beaches east of town on the C-550. A bonus is its waterslide. With more facilities than could ever be used, it is little wonder the price is a tad higher than normal: 4.70€ for adults, 3€ for a tent and 5€ for a car or caravan.

■ Ría de Vigo

The southernmost of the Rías Bajas is unique in that it widens out inland to form the bay of San Simón with the town of Redondela around it. Vigo, Galicia's largest city, is on the southern bank of this *ría*.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo de la Xunta de Galicia** is at #22 C/ Cánovas del Castillo, ☎ 98 643 05 77.

Getting Here & Around

The **Estación de Autobuses** is on Avda de Madrid, s/n, ☎ 98 633 411. Buses run all day long to Pontevedra, Tui, A Guarda, Santiago and A Coruña. Four buses per day run to **Madrid** and one per day to **San Sebastián**, **Bilbao** and **Salamanca**. The **Estación de Ferrocarril** (RENFE) is on Praza de Estación, with daily trains to **La Coruña**, **Pontevedra**, **Santiago**, **Orense** and **León**.

Sightseeing

While it's often written off as a dirty industrial city, Vigo does have a few redeeming qualities: the lively Cidade Vella with its **Berbés**, an old waterfront sailor's quarter; the **Mercado de A Pedra** in this quarter, where oysters are sold by the dozen or by the carload; the **Monte de Castro**, a green promontory in the new part of town with terrific vistas and a castle built over the remains of an ancient *castro*, one of numerous fortified hamlets in Galicia that date to the Bronze Age; and the **Parque Natural de Isles Cíes**.

Adventures on Water

The small archipelago of **Isles Cíes** is a wildlife refuge at the mouth of Vigo's *ría*, part of the Parque Natural de Islas Atlánticas that also includes the Islas de Ons and Sálvora. Though often thought to be two beaches, the Isles Cíes are actually four, with the diminutive **Isla de Viños** just off the **Isla de Monte Faro** and **Isla de Monte Agudo** connected by a stretch of beach forming a crystalline lagoon. Ferries don't run to the fourth island of **San Martiño ou do Sur**. Covered with pine and eucalyptus, the islands harbor the largest colony of seagulls in Galicia (over 20,000 breeding pairs) and the Rías Bajas most pristine beaches. They are a worthy attraction for hikers, sunbathers and scuba divers; unfortunately, access is limited for protective purposes to 2,200 visitors per day and visits are possible only from June 15th through September 15th. Contact the **Cíes Interpretation Center** to make arrangements *(Estación Maritimo, ☎ 98 680 54 69)*. There is a controlled **campsite** on the largest island and boats connect it regularly to the port at Vigo. Reservations for the campsite and the boats can be made at the Estación Maritimo. The ferries leave nine times a day when the park is open, the earliest at 9 am and the latest at 7 pm *(14€ for adults, 4€ for kids round-trip)*.

Another option for visiting the islands, or at least getting close and with a different perspective, is through one of the two **scuba diving** shops in Vigo, **Alfaya Náutica** *(Oporto 24, ☎ 98 643 13 15, www.alfayanautica.com, info@alfayanautica.com)* and the **Centro de Buceo Vigomare** *(Avda. de Fragroso 62, ☎ 98 623 83 60, fax 98 623 83 60)*.

Where to Stay & Eat

In touring around the *ría*, it's worth making a stop in **Arcade** for its oysters and **Vilaboa** for its homemade wine. The **Hotel Husa Bahía de Vigo** *(Avda Cánovas del Castillo 5, ☎ 98 622 67 00, d 120€)* is a longtime landmark in Vigo. Locals use it to direct tourists to the tourism office (it's below) and the port because signs point to the hotel all over town. It is situated on the bay, with the quaint old fishing quarter behind it.

Hostal Canaima *(C/ García Barbón 42, ☎ 98 643 26 41)* has rooms and facilities more fitting for a two-star hotel than a hostel. A double is 45€, so the price is at least on par.

■ Ría de Pontevedra

The Morrazo Peninsula separates this *ría* (estuary) from the Ría de Vigo to the south. **O Hío**, at the very end of the peninsula, warrants a detour for the elaborate 19th-century **Cruceiro**, right, near its Romanesque church. These stone crosses are found throughout Galicia – in plazas, at crossroads – but few are as moving as O Hío's. Carved of granite and yellowed by lichen, it depicts tormented souls in hell at its base and at the top disciples, one of whom is climbing a ladder, lowering Christ from the crucifix.

The **Praia Barra** near O Hío is a popular beach, long with dark sand.

Sightseeing

Off the cape of O Hío are the **Islas de Ons** sheltering the mouth of the *ría*; another archipelago under the protections of the Parque Natural de Islas Atlánticas, they can be reached by ferry from the ports of Sanxenxo or Portonovo on the north (or opposite) coast of the *ría*. Islanders inhabited these islands until the mid-'70s, eking out a living selling shellfish and octopus. From the disembarkation point at the pier of Area dos Cans, hikers make for the lighthouse, the picturesque beach of Melide and the Cova do Inferno, a gaping hole in the granite washed beneath by the sea. Mar de Ons ferries run from Sanxenxo to the islands seven times daily from June 29th until September 15th. A round-trip ticket is 10€ for adults and 5€ for children.

After passing through Pontevedra, follow the northern coast of the *ría* through Poio, which has a monastery founded by Benedictine monks in the 16th century, to **Combarro**. The town, wrapped around a colorful fishing port, looks as old as any on the Galician coast. At the end of a series of unique alleyways that run all the way down to the water are *hórreos* everywhere (along with the odd *cruceiro* here and there). These stone granaries are a ponderous sight. They are thought to be the work of early Celtiberians who used them to dry corn, though no one knows for sure. These long, rectangular structures set above ground on pillars have added a popular historic and artistic appeal to this mound of dirt and granite.

There aren't many options for staying the night in Combarro unless a local offers up his bed. The best bet is to stay in Pontevedra and make a day excursion of it.

Continuing along the *ría*, on the secluded Mount Castrove outside the town of Samieira is the **Monasterio de Armenteira**. Tradition has it that the monastery's first abbot went for a walk one day in the nearby woods and became lost. Three centuries later he returned from his walk, thinking he'd only been gone for the afternoon. On the road leading to this 12th-century Romanesque church is a *mirador* with a great view over the *ría*.

■ Ría de Arousa

Sightseeing

El Grove is situated on a peninsula within a peninsula, surrounded by pristine beaches and revered for its shellfish. The Ría de Arousa is Galicia's largest and easily its most ecologically diverse *ría*, with sand dunes, islands and small lagoons carved out of the granite. West of town along the Punta con Negro is the wild sweep of **A Lanzada beach** – an area the locals of Pontevedra swear by – while east of it is the **Isla de A Toxa**. Boats run from El Grove to this island full of tourists seeking its medicinal mud and water; they return with bags of soap made on the island thought to alleviate skin and respiratory ailments. One shouldn't leave El Grove without having sampled the copious varieties of crab, shrimp, lobsters, scallops and clams served at the *tabernas* along the water.

Mejilloneras

The griddle-shaped platforms in many of Galicia's *rías* are a confounding sight. Do they anchor boats? Are they some strange water sculpture? Nope. They're traps. Beneath each square, hundreds of ropes dangle into the depths, attracting mussels. At regular intervals they're pulled up and harvested, sustaining one of Galicia's major industries.

Cambados

Across the lagoon from El Grove, Cambados has a gem of an old quarter and a proud seafaring past. These days the town is better known for its Albariño wine, a white bottled under the appellation d'origine Rías Baixas. This golden colored wine is noted for its full, fruity taste.

The **Plaza de Fefiñán** is the heart of the old quarter, highlight by the Baroque **Palacio de Fefiñán**. The palace, one of many typical Galician *pazos* located throughout the old quarter, is now a winery open to tourists. Each year in August Cambados celebrates its Albariño wines with the **Festa do Albariño**.

In town the *casa rural* **A Patora** *(Rúa do Castro, 5-B, ☎ 98 654 32 73, fax 98 654 32 73, casapastora@terra.es)* is a relatively new stone two-story with a tiled roof that rents private double rooms for 52€. If you only plan to stay in the area for a day or two, however, a *casa rural* may be impractical as they often require multiple-night stays.

There is also a terrific state-run hotel in town, **Albariño-Parador Nacional** *(Paseo de Cervantes, s/n, ☎ 98 654 22 50, fax 98 654 20 68, cambados@parador.es)*. A double with character and the amenities costs 109€ per night. **Hostal Residencia Barral** *(Avda Vilariño 86, ☎ 98 654 32 08, fax 98 652 48 58)* has 20 quasi-modern rooms with television and private bath. A double is 36€.

Near Cambados, in the waters off Vilanova de Arousa (the hometown of Spain's celebrated writer Ramón del Valle-Inclán), the **Isla de Arousa** offers over 30 prized beaches (ferries run between the two on a regular basis).

Padrón

Inland from the *ría*, Padrón is a riverside town with quite a reputation. The remains of the Apostle St. James are said to have been brought to its port after the saint was martyred in the holy land in 44 AD, only to vanish for 800 years. The **Iglesia de Santiago** next to the bridge – also known as the Iglesia Parroquial – displays the stone (*el pedrón*) to which the Apostle's vessel was moored way back when. Padrón also has a strong literary heritage as the hometown of Spain's Nobel-prize winning writer Camilo José Cela and longtime residence of the Galician poet Rosalia de Castro. The sculpted head of Cela greets visitors to La Fundacion Camilo Jose Cela in a former canon residence, the **Casa de los Canonigos**, with displays of his work as well as some contemporary art from his private collection. The **Casa Museo Rosalia de Castro** occupies La Matanza, the house where the Galician poetess lived and died next to the Iglesia de Santiago. The museum has plenty of her work on display and claims to be the most visited museum in Galicia.

SOME ARE HOT

Finally, Padrón is recognized as the big papa of peppers in Spain. Padrón was one of the first Spanish towns to receive the green peppers on boats arriving in the 16th century from the New World. Known as *pimientos de Padrón* and available throughout Spain, they are small, green, puckered from frying in oil and generally mild – all except for the random fire pepper, which gives rise to the popular phrase, "Os pementos de Padrón, uns pican, outros non" (Padrón's peppers, some are hot, others are not).

Surprisingly, there aren't many good restaurants in Padrón that I've been able to locate. Fortunately, the *mesones* in town take pride in one thing, their *pimientos de Padrón*. The **Restaurante Chef River** *($$$$, Enlace Parque 7, ☎ 98 181 04 13)* follows the rule in this respect, but is an exception to the local dining experience as a pricey, some say exceptional, restaurant – part of the ☆☆ **Hotel Rivera** *(Enlace Parque 7, ☎ 98 181 04 13, d 40€)*. The hotel and restaurant are a short walk from the city center or a 2€ taxi ride. From the bridge and Iglesia de Santiago, walk to Avda de Camilo José Cela, make a right. When you reach the manicured gardens in the road, make a left on C/ Enlace Parque.

The **bus and train stations** are across the Avda de Camilo José Cela from the huddle of the old quarter, next to the Cela Foundation. From the bridge, follow Calle Ruiz Pons, then Rosalia de Castrol, crossing over the Avda to C/ Herbon Cotos Salmoneros. The **Oficina de Turismo** is located in a *caseta* (a small kiosk) on the Avda de Compostela, ☎ 98 161 13 29.

■ Ría de Muros y Noia

West of Santiago de Compostela, the Ría de Muros y Noya edges into the coast between two mountainous peninsulas. Near the cape of Corrubedo on the southern peninsula of Barbanza, the **Praia Area Longa** has been a playground since the Celts roamed the lands. Ruins of their settlement have

been excavated next to the beach. Near the village of Xuño, the solitary **Praia Furnas** has been carved by the sea into a wild grouping of natural arches and sinkholes known as the Piedras Negras.

Called "little Compostela," the town of Noia is situated at the merging of the *ría* with the River Tambre. The medieval quarter is notable for its Baroque mansions, Romanesque churches and attractively porticoed streets. The portal of the Romanesque **Iglesia de Santa María** is adorned with an interesting polychromatic depiction of the Adoration of the Magi and the **Iglesia de San Martín** façade depicts an arch of the 12 wise men not unlike that found on the Catedral in Santiago. Strangely enough, the cemetery – one of the oldest in Galicia – is the major attraction in Noia. Known as the **Cemetario de Quintana dos Mortos**, it contains tombstones dating to the 10th century, some with the coat of arms still visible, along with a couple of 15th-century *cruceiros*. Tradition has it that the cemetery was sanctified with sand brought from Palestine by a group of Galician fishermen. The ☆**Hotel Noia** *(C/ Curros Enríquez 27, ☎ 98 182 25 52)* is short on personality but centrally located. A no-frills double room costs 45€.

The **tourism office** is in the Plaza Alameda, ☎ 98 182 41 69.

Muros

Across the Río Tambre, Muros is another of Galicia's maritime villages. It spreads up the slope of a gentle hill from the port. After a day on the water, local fishermen anchor their colorful boats in the port and haul out their catch to sell in the square known as the Pescadería Vella. There isn't all that much to see but plenty of fresh seafood to be had throughout town. Try **Don Bodegón** *(Porta da Vila 20, ☎ 98 182 78 02)*, a restaurant well known for its fish and octopus.

On July 16 each year, Muro celebrates its small pilgrimage, the **Romería del Carmen**, with a reenactment of a 1544 naval battle that occurred nearby between the Spanish and French fleets. On the way out of town, notice the shrine of the Virxe do Camiño, originally a leper hospital but later used by ailing pilgrims en route to the cape of Fisterra (Finisterre), thought in the Middle Ages to be the end of the world.

Orense

With its *"Casco Antiguo"* signs, Spain has done a commendable job of fast-tracking tourists through the disheartening urban sprawl of its cities to the heart of the matter. In the case of Orense, the capital of Galicia's southwestern province, follow the signs (but not before having a look at the Roman bridge across the Río Mino). The Romans were attracted to Orense for its hot springs, which were thought to have therapeutic properties and still are; in the view of a skeptic who sought to relieve a head cold in them, they're simply hot. The *Casco Antiguo* conforms to what was a green hill like the others around it; there couldn't have been a better use for the hill. The rise and fall of its narrow, cobbled streets and the golden sheen of its granite buildings make for a privileged setting. Adding to its color, a man in the Plaza Mayor has the fanciest shoe-shine set-up in all of Spain. Snap his picture and expect to pay for your shoes to be shiny on a walk through old Orense.

■ Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo del Ayuntamiento** *(As Burgas 12, ☎ 98 836 60 64)* is a small office across from the hot springs, good for a city map and little more. The **Patronato Proincal de Turismo** *(Rúa do Progreso 28, ☎ 98 839 10 85)*, around the corner from the Plaza Obispo Cesáreo, can supply more information.

Adventure Guides

Montaña y Acción can supply information on outdoor sports in the provinces of Orense and Pontevedra. To make money, their guides lead rock climbing, canyoning and repelling trips in the environs of Orense *(Plaza del Couto 1, ☎ 98 823 61 50, fax 98 822 10 76; 30-35€ per trip).*

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación de Ferrocarril *(Eulogio Goez Frangueira, s/n, ☎ 90 224 02 02)* is on the far side of the Río Miño from the *Casco Antiguo*. Having spent a good hour looking for it, I recommend catching a taxi at the queue in Parque de San Lazaro, or the bus, which also has a stop at the park. There is a ticket office in the shopping mall of the old quarter, Rúa do Paseo 15.

By Bus: The bus station *(Ctra de Vigo 1, ☎ 98 821 60 27)* is northwest of town, across the river and too far to walk. Flag a taxi or catch Bus 6 or 12 from any of the bus stops in town.

By Car: Orense is east of Pontevedra on the N-541 and of Vigo on the A-52. The N-525 runs northwest to Santiago de Compostela, from where the N-550 runs north to La Coruña. Lugo is north on the N-540. The N-120 runs west from León to Orense.

■ Sightseeing

It makes sense to explore Orense by starting in the **Plaza Mayor**, as the majority of the few sights are in the immediate area. Long a dirt fair ground, the square is surrounded by stands of colorful residential buildings split into small blocks by streets radiating off from it. A uniform ground-floor arcade gives these classical buildings a semblance of harmony. Using the grade of the square as a guide, walk out the highest corner of the plaza to reach the **Catedral de San Martiño**. Built in the 13th century as Romanesque styling was giving way to Gothic, the Catedral boasts a huge dome above its transept and the Pórtico del Paraiso, a Baroque entranceway modeled after the Pórtico de la Gloria of Santiago's Catedral. As rosaries and red wine go hand in hand, the area around the Catedral is credited with Orense's best nightlife. If an eegant cloister, part of a former Franciscan monastery, sounds interesting, walk straight up the hill to the **Claustro de San Francisco** *(open Mon.-Fri. 11 am-2 pm and 6-9 pm, Sat. and Sun. 11 am-2 pm).*

Returning to Plaza Mayor, pass between the Casa de Concello (the town hall and the only building with a clock) and the restaurant tables huddled under the shade of the arcade to the left of it to reach the city's **Museo Arqueolóxico** *(Praza Major, s/n, ☎ 98 822 38 84, open Tues.-Sat. 9:30 am-2:30 pm and 4-9 pm, Sun. 9:30 am-2:30 pm, entry 1.50€).* The museum fills the former Bishop's palace with relics from the Paleolithic age to

the Renaissance. Steps lead from it to the **Iglesia Santa María Madre**, an 18th-century Baroque church with a few columns salvaged from the city's earliest cathedral that once claimed the space.

In Plaza Mayor again, walk to the right of the Casa de Concello and turn down C/ Dr. Marañon to reach **Las Burgas**. The historical hot springs of Orense have been harnessed by a group of fountains in the Praza das Burgas. Steam rises above and locals come to bathe, wash clothes or heal a broken toe or two. Rúa do Progresso is the busy street running across a bridge next to the hot baths. Cross over the other side to check if the local crafts market is underway, then hike up the rúa to **Plaza Obispo Cesáreo**. The large plaza is well-manicured and colored with flowers. The **Pazo Oca-Valladares**, a 16th-century Renaissance palace, faces the plaza.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

Hostal Cándido *(C/ Hermanos Villar 31, ☎ 98 822 96 07, fax 98 824 21 97)* is on a quiet street shared by two other hostels, two blocks from the Plaza Mayor. Look for the Chocolateria sign, indicating a nice café downstairs that doesn't actually sell much chocolate. The hostel rooms are relatively new, with private bath and television. The other two affordable accommodations on the street are the ☆ **Hotel-Residencia Zarampallo** *(C/ Hermanos Villar 15, ☎ 98 822 00 53, d 45€)* and **Hostal Irixo** *(C/ Hermanos Villar 23, ☎ 98 822 00 35)*, which has modest rooms overlooking the evocative little *plazeula*.

From the balcony of the **Meson Casa de María Andrea** (on the corner of C/ San Miguel and Hermanos Villar) one might just as well be in San Miguel or another pleasant Latin American city. The *meson* serves delicious Galician *tapas* either fresh or fried in the bar downstairs and dinner upstairs and at the romantic tables on the balcony. Pablo, the extremely friendly bartender downstairs, spent some time in the States and speaks broken English. He can explain what the list of *tapas* on the wall includes and recommend a good regional wine to go with them.

■ Excursions from Orense

O Ribeiro

The region of O Ribeiro west of Orense is known across the country for its wines. **Ribadavia**, formerly the capital of the kingdom of Galicia in the 11th century, is the main town in the area. Set along the Río Miño, Ribadavia has a long history of winemaking linked to the Jews that improved irrigation and terracing techniques in the region. Spread around the Magdalena Square, the immaculate Barrio Judío is Galicia's best proof of their occupation. Before the Jews were expelled by the Christians in the 16th century, they had all but cornered the Spanish wine market in northwestern Spain with their Ribeiro wines. These whites, always in a green bottle and found throughout Spain, are young and slightly acidic with a hint of fruitiness. Each year at the end of April and beginning of May, Ribadavia celebrates its vines with the **Ribeiro Wine Festival**.

Adventures on Water

South of Ribadavia on the Río Miño, still in the O Ribeiro region, is **Arnoia**. This diminutive village is the first in a string of riverfront communities along the Embalse de Frieira, a narrow reservoir of

the Miño. In Arnoia or Frieira to the south, you can hop aboard a catamaran and enjoy the Ribeiro wines while floating between green hills as far as Portugal and back. Catamarans are a common feature on Galicia's larger rivers and a perfectly lazy way to explore them. **Autna Cruceros por el Río Miño** *(☎ 62 921 11 84)* is the main operator in the area. The catamarans depart Frieira at noon each day, run through Cortegada, Figueira as far as Arnoia, with a few hours in the last village to explore the area. They return to Friera by 5:15 pm. Another boat departs Frieira at 5:30 pm and returns at 8:15. From Arnoia, you can catch the boat at 4 pm, run the same course south and return by 6:45 pm. The round-trip costs 13.50€. The open-air seats of the top deck are fun, but with frequent rain the covered main deck is a savior. Also in Arnoia, **Actuar** rents mountains bikes and runs its own catamaran *(C/ Vila Termal 1, ☎ 98 849 24 99)*.

Adventures on Snow

East of Orense in the Sierra de Queixa, **La Estación de Montaña Manzaneda** is Galicia's only ski resort. On a good year, the slopes are open from the end of November through early April. During the rest of the year the forests and base camp are given over to hiking, golfing and organized youth activities, including archery, horseback riding and mountain biking. The ski resort has 12 runs of varied difficulty serviced by two sit-down lifts and five *telesillas* (what we call poma-lifts). On the weekends, lift tickets are 19€ for adults and 12€ for children 12 and under. Weekday passes are 13€ and 9€, respectively. The base village rents ski equipment (21€ for the full set-up), offers ski classes (22€ per hour) and rents bungalows (four-person 50€; six-person 100€). In the summer, mountain bikes can be rented for 7€ per hour; a guided horseback jaunt costs 9€ per hour. To reach the resort, take the C-536 east from Orense (one hour). *(Pobra de Trives, Orense; reservations ☎ 98 830 97 47, fax 98 831 08 75, www.manzaneda.com.)*

La Coruña

The charm of the Galician countryside vanishes in the oil-refinery smokestacks and high rises of La Coruña and then reappears in a small corner of the city that has stood still for centuries. La Coruña still thrives on its seafaring ways, but its forward-mentality has distanced it from the rest of Galicia, a region that has traditionally clung to conservative ideals and – thankfully – been slow to develop. It claims a small peninsula between the Atlantic and one of Galicia's numerous *rías*, or fjord-like inlets, has the second-largest population in the region behind Vigo and one of the country's leading fishing ports. The city was founded by the Celts as a port for the tin trade and then expanded under the Romans. Its later history reads like a guidebook to British seafaring dos and don'ts. In 1588 the Spanish Armada set sail triumphantly from La Coruña and, after a devastating face off with the Brits, returned as a few floating pieces of wood. Then, during the Peninsular War, the Brits suffered an equally debilitating loss when the French repelled them from the city; in the rush to re-board their boats, the English General Sir John Moore was killed and is buried in the city. On the lighter side, La Coruña is known as the Crystal City for the glass façades of its homes; when

the sun reflects off of the crystal palaces, La Coruña shines like nowhere else in Spain, and this, perhaps, makes it worth the trip.

■ Useful Information

The Xunta de Galicia **tourist office** is located on the port *(Dársena de la Marina, s/n, ☎ 98 122 18 22).* The municipal tourism office is in the Atalaya building *(Jardines de Méndez Núnez, ☎ 98 121 61 61).*

■ Festivals

During the month of August, La Coruña celebrates its heroine **María Pita** with parades, a mock naval battle, a Romería (short pilgrimage) and a multitude of shows and art exhibitions. **El Noche de San Juan**, June 23-24, is celebrated throughout Spain; here it's a great big beach bash with bonfires, roasting sardines in celebration of the opening of the season and plenty of concerts and fireworks.

■ Getting Here & Away

By Train: The Estación de San Cristóbal *(C/ San Cristóbal, s/n, ☎ 98 115 02 02)* is across the Avda de Alfonso Molina from the bus station. Daily trains include: **Santiago** (one hour), **Pontevedra** (1½ hours), **Vigo** (three hours) and **Madrid** (nine hours).

By Bus: The Estación de Autobuses *(C/ Caballeros, s/n, ☎ 98 123 90 99)* is located off the main Avda de Alfonso Molina that begins at the port and carries through the new part of town. Daily buses include: **Vigo** (2½ hours), **Santiago** (one hour), **Pontevedra** (1½ hours), **El Ferrol** (1½ hours), **Madrid** (nine hours), **Oviedo** (5½ hours), **Santander** (10 hours) and **San Sebastián** (13-14 hours).

By Car: The N-VI goes all the way northwest from Madrid to La Coruña, passing Lugo along the way. From Vigo, both Pontevedra and Santiago are south from La Coruña on the N-550.

■ Sightseeing

La Coruña occupies a small peninsula, with the modern part of the city known as the *Pescaderia* beginning in the isthmus and spreading into the mainland. The eastern side of the peninsula is surrounded by the estuary, Ría de A Coruña; the Puerto de A Coruña occupies a sheltered cove off it. The Ciudad Vieja, the oldest neighborhood of La Coruña, is between the port and the ría on the southernmost tip of the peninsula. Most of the sights are scattered in this area. The rest of the peninsula, as far as the hill topped by the Torre de Hércules, is given over mostly to residential districts. On the Atlantic side, the cove known as the Ensenada del Orzan shelters the city's two main beaches, less than a five-minute walk to the port on the other side. The best way to see the sights is to walk the Paseo Maritímo or take the tram around the perimeter of the peninsula from the port as far as the Playa del Orzán on the far side (it runs every 30 minutes between the two). With this in mind...

The **Avenida de la Marina** is an attractive, tree-lined thoroughfare running along the port as far as the Ciudad Vieja. Shimmering in the sunlight, the mansions fronting this avenue display the typical *gallerias*, or

glass-encased balconies, for which La Coruña is renowned. Though ornamental, these glass façades came into fashion as a way of guarding against the damp Galician weather. The Oficina de Turismo is located off this avenue, which merges with twisted streets of the Ciudad Vieja near the Plaza de María Pita. A statue of **María**, the city's heroine, stands in the center of the square atop a few bodies of Sir Francis Drake's less fortunate followers.

The **Ciudad Vieja** is a serene escape from this bawdy city, with age-old mansions and evocative squares. Look out for the two 12th-century Romanesque churches of **Santiago** and **Santa María del Campo** and the homely **Plazuela de las Barbaras**. At the edge of the old city, near the Puerto Deportivo, is the small **Jardín de San Carlos**. A stone monument marks the grave of the British General Sir John Moore. He was cut down by a canon ball in the Battle of Elviña after valiantly turning back to face the French forces and buy his fleeing troops precious time to board their ships.

Long the protector of La Coruña's vital port, the 15th-century fort, **Castilla de San Antón**, has seen the nobler days of canon balls, when prisoners were shackled inside; today it is home to the regional **Museo Arqueológico**. Explore the castle, then have a look at the various relics from prehistoric through medieval Galician times. There is an interesting exhibition on the *castro*, the round fortified homes surrounded by a complex of smaller ones that comprised Galicia's earliest suburbs. *(☎ 98 120 59 94, open winters 10 am-2 pm and 4-7 pm, summers 10 am-2 pm and 4-7:30 pm, entry 2€.)*

The **Torre de Hércules**, left, is La Coruña's oldest monument and the only Roman lighthouse left in the world. It was built in the second century AD during the reign of Emperor Trajan and in the eons since has acquired a legend. After defeating the three-bodied giant Geryon, it is said that Hercules built this tower atop his foe's remains. Thanks to an 18th-century restoration job, the lighthouse still shines, making it also the oldest functioning one in the world. A climb to the top offers the best views for miles around. *(☎ 98 120 27 59, open winters 10 am-5:45 pm; April-June 10 am-6:45 pm; July-Aug. Fri.-Sat. 9 am-11:45 pm, entry 2€.)*

The city recently created three entertaining museums, **Las Tres Casas Coruñesas**, each dedicated to a realm of scientific exploration. At the base of the hill and the Torre de Hércules, the **Casa de los Peces** has over 250 living, breathing and copulating species of marine life, as well as representations of ecosystems from every corner of the globe. *(Paseo Maritímo, ☎ 98 121 71 91, open 10 am-7 pm, entry 2€; planetarium 1€ and open only at scheduled times.)*

Continue around the base of the hill to the Atlantic Coast and you will find the **Museo Domus** in the Casa del Hombre. This museum is concerned with the interrelation between man and machines. Part science, part natural history with an anthropological bent, the museum has motorized gadgets, electronic gizmos and an Imax theater to make sense of it all. *(C/ Santa Teresa 1, ☎ 98 121 70 00, open 10 am-7 pm, entry 2€ plus 1.20€ for the IMAX.)*

Before visiting the last of the Casas Coruñesas, it makes sense with this trajectory to stop first at the **Museo de Bellas Artes**. In an award-winning building constructed in the mid-nineties over the remains of a medieval convent, the fine arts museum of La Coruña offers a sampling of European paintings spanning the 16th and 17th centuries, along with sculptures and plenty of coinage. *(☎ 98 120 56 30, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2:30 pm.)*

The **Casa de Las Ciencias**, in the Parque de Santa Margarita, is an octagonal-shaped pavilion packed with exhibitions on science and technology. A collection by the Galician naturalist Víctor López Seoane and a planetarium do their part for the natural world. *(Parque de Santa Margarita, s/n, ☎ 98 127 91 56, open winters Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, summers 11 am-9 pm, Sun. 11 am-2:30 pm.)*

Beaches

Along the promenade of the Ensenada del Orzan (the cove on the Atlantic side), **Playa Riazor** and adjoining **Playa Orzán** are by far the most popular. In the summers there appear to be more humans than sand particles. Find a spot if you must, or walk to the other side of the peninsula along the estuary, Ría de A Coruña. The small **Playa de San Amaro** is in the sheltered cove of the Ensenada de San Amaro on the stretch between Torre de Hércules and Puerto de A Coruña.

Along with the previously mentioned parks and beaches, there are still a few things left to do in town besides eat and sleep. As my mother says, "there's a shopaholic in every group." Send that one to the **Calle del Real**. This pedestrian **shopping** zone is the best around for pleasure purchases.

■ Nightlife

For broader horizons, the **Teatro Rosalía Castro** *(C/ de Riego de Agua)* and the **Palacio de Congresos-Auditorio** *(C/ Glorieta de América, ☎ 98 114 04 04)* host theater, opera and musical concerts.

The nightlife scene in La Coruña is no shirker. Bars are here and there, with one of the best groupings near the **Praza España**. Once they've closed, the discos open up along **C/ Juan Florez** and the beaches of Riazor and, particularly, **Orzán**.

■ Where to Stay

Unfortunately, La Coruña doesn't have the beautiful *paradors* or 16th-century palaces converted into hotels of other Spanish cities. ☆☆☆☆ **Meliá María Pita** *(Avda Pedro Barrié de la Maza 1, ☎ 98 120 50 00, fax 98 120 55 65, melia.maria.pita@solmelia.com, d 150)* is a modern hotel on the north end of Playa del Orzán. It's more glass than anything else. Spacious rooms have balconies and views of the ocean. ☆☆☆ **Hotel Riazor** *(Avda Pedro Barrié de la Maza 29, ☎ 98 125 34 00, fax 98 125 34 04, reserves@riazorhotel.com, d 90€)* is down the beach from the María Pita. It's a large hotel with the typical unattractive exterior found on so many buildings along the Spanish coast. The interior is modern and more than comfortable. **Hostal Linar** *(C/ General Mola 7, ☎ 98 122 10 92)*, just off Calle del Real, has an average and somewhat boring restaurant downstairs and very nice rooms upstairs, with telephone, television and private bath. A double is 35-40€. **Hostal La Perla** *(C/ Torreiro 11, ☎ 98 122 67 00)* has an assortment of 10 rooms to choose from. Those with private bathrooms cost 28-34€, depending on the season. Rooms with only a sink are around 25€.

■ What to Eat & Where

Unlike other Galician cities, La Coruña is well known for its *tapas* and the *mesones*, or traditional taverns, that serve them. **Trotamundos** *($, in the Plaza de España)* and **A Penela** *($, at #12 Plaza de Maria Pita)* are two favorites. In season, sardines are the pride of La Coruña and are included in many of the *tapas*; not to be outdone is the *pulpo Gallego* (octopus doused in olive oil, salt and paprika and served over roast potatoes) and the seafood *empanadas*.

The area around Plaza de Maria Pita is one of the best places to find a good seafood meal. But there is also a fine establishment near this square in the Cuidad Vieja that specializes in vegetarian cuisine. **Vegetariano** *($$, Porta de Aires, ☎ 98 121 38 26)* serves market-fresh dishes and *raciones* without all the fuss and for a reasonable price. Also in the area, the rustic **Fornos** *(C/ Olmos 25, ☎ 98 122 16 75)* has been serving seafood and grilled steaks since 1870.

Casa Pardo *($$$, C/ Novoa Santos 15, ☎ 98 128 00 21)* is across the port from Plaza de María Pita, but well worth the hike. Follow the avenues that wrap around the port and make a right on C/ Ramón y Cajal, then take the first left on C/ Pastor Díaz. This is a favorite of locals and often missed by tourists since it's in the newer part of town (the part built in the 19th century). A meal here will cost around 25€ per person when all is said and done, once the seafood croquettes, the hake loin in calamari sauce or the baked cod with peppers and black olives have been dealt with.

Another option in La Coruña is the **Mercado San Augustin** in Praza San Augustin. This indoor market gets fish fresh off the boats each day and has plenty of other stalls full of meats, cheeses and vegetables. Prices depend on the weight. If you don't speak Spanish well, the easiest way to order is to locate what you'd like (if it doesn't have a label, just point) and tell the person behind the counter in euros how much you'd like. Once they've cut or sliced that amount, they'll ask if it looks like enough. If not, request a little more.

Las Rías Altas

Galicia's northernmost *rías* or fjord-like inlets are markedly sedate compared to those along the southwestern coast. They begin north of the windswept cape of Finisterre (Fisterra), Spain's westernmost point. When the Celtics invaded they believed the cape to be the end of the known world. The Costa da Morte (Coast of Death) spans northward from this cape toward La Coruña. The waters off this rugged stretch of cliffs, rocky beaches and jagged protrusions are littered with shipwrecks – hence its name. At La Coruña four *rías* converge to form the Gulfo Ártabo. Continuing around the northern Galician coast of the Cantabrian Sea, the populations and tourists thin. The *rías* decrease in size until the last one at Ribadeo marks the border with Asturias. The northern *rías* delight with Galicia's least developed scenery, pockets of swimming holes, sea-shaped monuments and more than a few weird pagan rituals.

It's advisable to rent a car, as exploring this area of Galicia is difficult and unreliable with public transportation. You'll be able to reach the main coastal cities, but the places in-between are far more enjoyable to discover

■ Ferrol

Across the gulf, Ferrol makes La Coruña look like one of the seven cities of Cibola. It is a boorish old naval port town with a flagging shipping industry and an obvious link to Spain's dictatorial past. A brooding statue of Generalísimo Franco stands in the Plaza de España; he was born in Ferrol in 1892, the son of a naval administrator, destined to join the army and rise to the rank of general at the previously unheard of age of 33. Once Franco had ascended to his supreme controlling position after the Civil War, he banned the people of his hometown and the region from speaking their native tongue of Galego. Interestingly enough, local tourist pamphlets make no mention of their native son.

Useful Information

The **tourist office** is in the Magdalena district on Calle Magdalena 12 *(☎ 98 131 11 79)*, and there is another in the plaza of the Porta Nova on the road into town from La Coruña.

The **Estacion de Autobus** *(Paseo da Estación, s/n, ☎ 95 132 47 51)* and the **Estacion del Tren** *(Avda de Compostela, s/n, ☎ 98 137 13 04)*.

Sightseeing

In the district of A Magdalena, Ferrol exhibits its more colorful side. This grid of tree-lined promenades, iron balustrades and colorful glass-front houses was built in the 18th century, primarily to house naval personal. Fishermen still live in the less attractive older *barrio* known as Ferrol Vello next to it. The **Museo Naval**, housed in the former prison of San Campio, displays ship models, charts and loot from sunken ships acquired since the 17th century.

Near the mouth of the *ría* or estuary in San Felipe, **Castillo de San Felipe** was built in the 17th century to protect Spain's northern naval port of La Graña. The castle formed a fierce triangle of defense with two other castles, **Nuestra Señora de La Palma**, which was restored in the 18th century, and **San Martín**, which has been left to crumble. During their working days, a gigantic chain was strung across the *ría* or estuary between the castles to insure that enemy boats could not enter. Though far less spectacular than even some ruined castles in southern Spain, the complex of San Felipe is notable for its maze of walls and the sister castle across the water; thanks to restorations it is in remarkably good shape.

Just don't go walking in Ferrol expecting to enjoy a nice waterfront promenade (though there is one, it's mostly cluttered with port junkage). The most favorable beach is **Praia Doniños**, west of town on the Atlantic with a lagoon ripe for floating.

Where to Stay

The **Parador de Ferrol** *(C/ Almirante Fernández Martín, s/n, ☎ 98 135 67 20, fax 98 135 67 21, ferrol@parador.es, d 95€)* has a distinctly maritime décor, housed in a stately 18th-century mansion in the A Magdalena district. Many of its rooms (classy, spacious, with sailboat paintings) and the dining area look out large windows onto the port.

☆☆☆ **Hotel El Suizo** *(C/ Dolores 67, ☎ 98 130 04 00, fax 98 130 03 06, d 66-75€)* is tastefully styled in another elegant mansion of the A Magdalena district. The downstairs café is bright and airy and the suites are cool enough to satisfy Nicolas Cage (the doubles aren't near as exciting). Just down from it is the affordable **Hostal Real** *(C/ Dolores 11, ☎ 98 136 92 55, fax 98 136 82 56)*. A less appealing alternative, but cheap, is **Hostal Valencia** *(Ctra De Catabois 290, ☎ 98 137 03 12)*, near Plaza España and the Estacion de Autobus and the Estacion del Tren.

The nearest campsite is **Camping As Cabazas** *(☎ 98 136 57 06, camping@ascabazas.com)*, 10 km (6.2 miles) north from Ferrol in the town of Covas. The campsite charges 3€ per night, they rent canoes and have Internet access.

■ Cedeira

The mouth of the Ría de Cedeira is very narrow, giving its wider inland water the look of a peaceful lagoon set amid green hills. Cedeira is a serene and visually captivating town set along both banks of the River Condomiñas that runs to meet this calm *ría*. Numerous bridges cross its river, connecting the newer part of town to the old, with its glass-encased balconies reflected in the water. The riverfront promenade passes by this white row of houses, with plenty of seafood restaurants along the way.

The locals make their livelihood from the sea, netting bonitos (striped tunas) or braving the thrashing tide to scrape barnacles from the rocky cape of Ortegal nearby. Known as *percebes*, these tubular-shaped crustaceans are a delicacy in the area. **Náutico** *($$, Rúa do Mariñeiro 7, ☎ 98 148 00 11)*, on the promenade, is – *sobre todo* – the place to try them in Cedeira. Afterwards, slip into the old quarter to see the **Iglesia de Santa María do Mar**, a 16th-century Gothic church that was slightly defaced with ungainly concrete recently. The church still retains its two chapels bearing, most notably, images of the Virgin of the conception and childbirth.

Useful Information

The **Oficina de Turismo** is on Calle Ezequiel López 22 *(☎ 98 148 21 87)*. The **Estación de Autobuses** is across the river in the new part of town in the Praza da Estación, with daily connections to La Coruña (two hours) and Lugo (2½ hours).

Adventures on Water

Playa Do Rodo ou Pantín is recognized by the world surfing body as the best Spain has to offer. Each year the beach hosts the Pantín Classico, an international surfing event attracting the sport's top surfers. If you can't find a surf shop with a board for rent near this beach, it's time to get the eyes checked. **Praia Da Frouxeira**, the next beach west of Pantín, is good for windsurfing, comprised of a large and small beach surrounding the lagoon of Frouxeira. Within walking distance of Cedeira are the beaches of **Arealonga** and **A Magdalena**, the latter in a sheltered cove and with a surprisingly wide beach even when the tide is in.

Where to Stay

Hostal Brisas *(C/ Arriba da Ponte 19, ☎ 98 148 10 54)* is centrally located, with simple rooms and the river just outside the door. Doubles are 25€.

THE STRANGE PILGRIMAGE

The village of San Andrés e Teixedo, east on the coast from Cedeira, is the destination of a strange pilgrimage. A pagan legend has survived in this village that if a person does not make a pilgrimage to the shrine in the center of town, they will certainly do so as an animal in the afterlife. The pilgrims that succumb to this myth while still living therefore take pains not to step on even the smallest insect en route to the shrine. After blessing the shrine, the pilgrims continue to a spot on the coast, make a wish and toss a piece of bread into the sea. If the bread floats, the wish will come true.

■ Viveiro

Clinging to its Celtic heritage with bagpipes and fair-complexioned locals, Viveiro lies at the mouth of the River Landro flowing into the Ría de Viveiro. Three fires, the first one in the 16th century, have leveled the town, though three of its medieval gates, an ironic number, managed to survive. The **Gate of Carlos V** is the fanciest of them, looming over the bank of the river and opening onto a series of cobbled streets rising steeply between the houses set on a hill.

Viveiro is noted for its impassioned celebration of Semana Santa in the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Each day the processions begin at its Romanesque cum Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María**. Nearby is the 14th-century **Convento de San Francisco** and a curious grotto modeled after Lourdes' in France; in that country a 14-year-old girl had numerous visions of the Virgin Mary, leading the clergy to build a monastery on the sight. The spring under *its* grotto is believed to have healing properties. In this country you'll occasionally see dolls and manikin heads strung on the grotto. Whether the doll is sick or the manikin hoping to be "reheaded" is anybody's guess and the locals' longstanding joke.

Useful Information

The **tourism office** is on Avda Ramón Canosa, ☎ *98 256 08 79*; the **bus station** is on Avda Galicia, ☎ *98 256 01 03*; and the **train station** (Ferrocarril de la Costa) is at the Estación de Verxeles, ☎ *98 256 08 79*.

Adventures on Foot

A road and trail lead from the Convento de San Francisco up the hill to the **Mirador del Monte de San Roque**. It's a 20-minute walk that's easy enough for all non-smokers. The view of the *ría* (estuary) from the top is worth the trip. It's also worth it for the

Mesón de San Roque *(Monte de San Roque, ☎ 98 256 16 15)*, serving seafood *tapas* and a lively crowd on weekend nights.

Adventures on Water

East of Viveiro near the village of Burela, the **Praia A Marosa** beach is frequented by windsurfers for the strong tides and winds that buffet it. **Praia Area**, on the east side of the ría, is another windsurfing spot with a youth hostel and the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Residencia Ego** *(☎ 98 256 09 87, d 70€)*. It has good views of the Cantabrian Sea. **Praia Covas** and **Praia Sacido** are west of Viveiro on the *ría*. The former has a camping site, **Camping Vivero** *(☎ 98 256 00 04)*, open from June to September, while the latter is reached by a 300-m (980-foot) path off the road.

HORSE PLAY

Horses still roam wild in the hills of Galicia, as many as 100,000 of them. Each summer, Gallegos from a handful of communities set out to do what their ancestors have done for 2,000 years; they head into the hills and round up as many of the wild beasts as they can. The herds are driven back to the *curros* (corrals) and **Las Rapas das Bestas** begins. During a three-day celebration, brave, bare-chested youngbloods wade into the sea of brown hides brandishing scissors and long sticks with a lasso at the end. They mount the horses when they can, get bucked off occasionally, but always manage to subdue even the wildest stallion long enough to shear their manes and brand their flesh. When the festival draws to a close, the youngest horses are returned to the wild and the rest are history.

■ Ribadeo

In Galego, this town's name means "the border." It is located on the last of Galicia's *rías*, the Ría de Ribadeo, which separates Galicia from Asturias. An impressive bridge runs across the Río Eo from the town to Castropo on the other side.

Useful Information

The **tourism office** is in Plaza España, ☎ *98 212 86 89*; the **bus station** is on Avda Rosalía de Castrol.

Sightseeing

For the most part, Ribadeo has a relaxed beach town atmosphere, with its share of tourists in the summer. They don't come for monuments, though there are two striking Modernist palaces, **Casa de los Moreno** and **Ibáñez**, as well as the comparatively austere **Convento de Santa Clara**. The attraction is the beaches around town. The first beach heading west is **Os Castros**, a fine sandy one banked by striated rock outcroppings; farther along is the spectacular **Praia As Catedrais**, on

which the sea has carved a series of immense archways into the granite walls. The beach is best visited at low tide when the waterholes aren't filled up. Surfing is best farther west on the **Praia de Lóngara** and **Praia Fontela-Valea** beaches. Members of the Civil Protection Services are on hand at the latter to ensure no one gets pulled under by the frequently strong undertows.

Where to Stay

Two km (1.2 mile) outside of Ribadeo is the **Casa Rural Huerta de Obe** *(Ctra de Santa Cruz, ☎ 98 212 87 15)*, which rents rooms in its 13th-century *casa indiano*, a type of rural dwelling once common in the region. It's worth sacrificing the comfortable, air-conditioned confines of a four-star hotel to stay here. The rooms are rustic but inviting and adjoin an enchanting sitting area. Doubles are 45-55€. Ribadeo also has a ☆☆☆☆ **Parador hotel** *(C/ Amador Fernández, s/n, ☎ 98 212 88 25, www.parador.es, d 85-95€)* and plenty of budget hostels, including **Hostal Orol** *(Rinconada de San Francisco 9, ☎ 98 212 87 42)*, off the main Praza España.

Balearic Islands

Introduction

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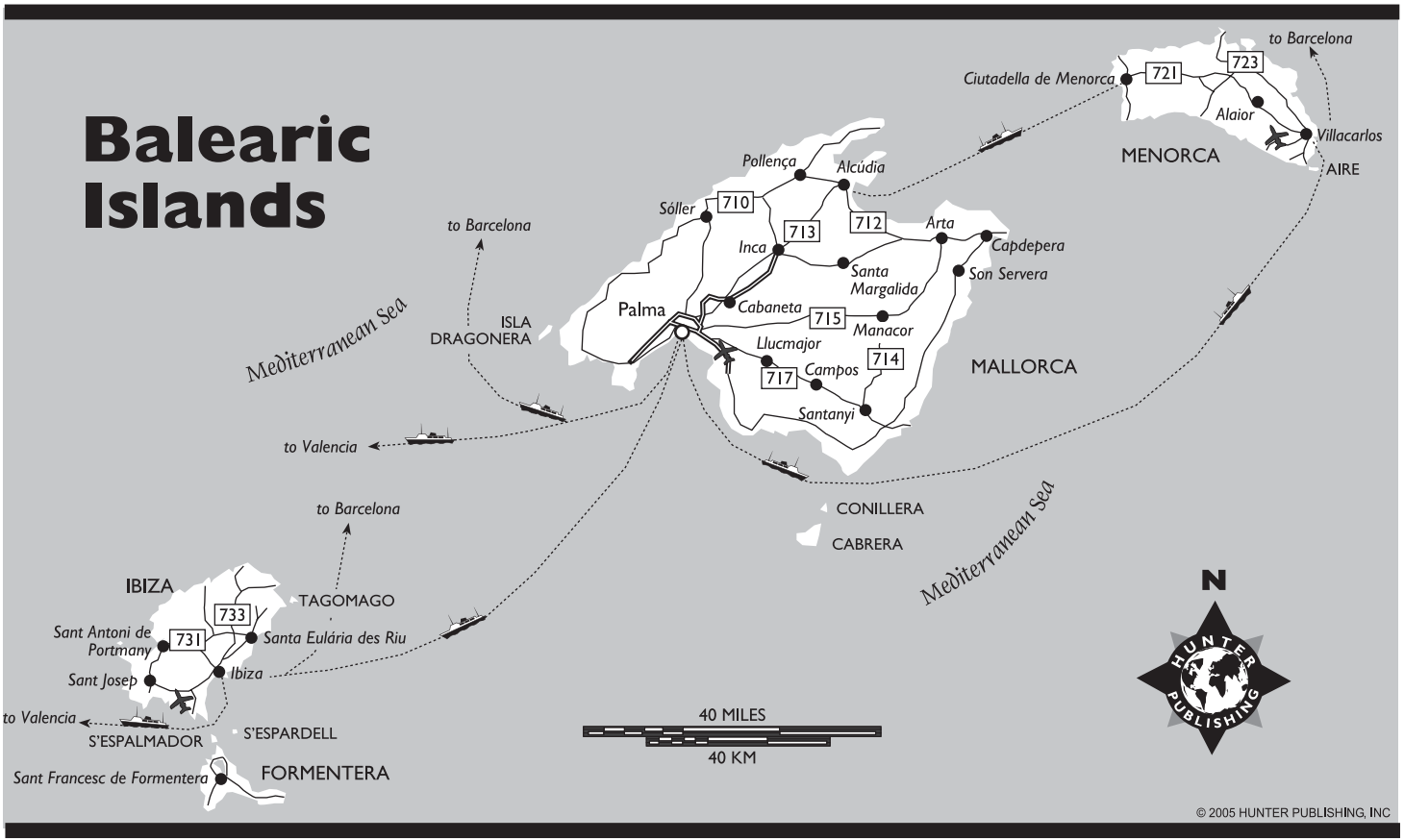
Blame Robinson Crusoe and decades of shipwreck movies, the glossy four-color articles that sell travel magazines, the newlywed neighbors just returned from a "heavenly" honeymoon in Bora Bora, Robin Leach and the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and every Sunday travel section in every city across the nation. Islands, with the allure of all that seems to be missing from our own towns and cities, agitate our greatest fantasies – namely that of solitude and sunshine, bare feet in sand with frozen drink in hand, the shade of palm trees cooling burnt skin and a pampering service industry are just a plane ticket and a discounted package holiday away. I've been duped, maybe you've been duped, and now we're here on an island like Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, Formentera or Cabrera – the Balearic Islands (*Illes Balears* in Catalan) that form the smallest of Spain's autonomous communities. Instead of miles of beaches lined with greenery there are the salty stretches of pine thickets around dry, rocky coves; instead of palms nudging right up to the beaches there are the sheer cliffs. Instead of coconuts there are the oranges of the mountain regions where you find, not thatched huts, but homes of native stone.

One can appreciate the rugged elegance of the Balearics' traditional flagstone homes, with their sandy blond barrel tile roofs and Kelly green window shutters, built just so they can be capably buttoned up when the winter weather mandates, to withstand fierce northerlies known as the *tramuntana* that lash the otherwise serene landscapes of the islands – particularly those of Mallorca and Menora. The weather of these two northernmost islands is like that of Cataluña Peninsula to the west, a region with which the native islanders share an insular form of the Catalan language known as Mallorquín. Along with its cultural ties and shared history of conquered Moors and medieval seafaring, the islands – with the exception of Menorca which is a distinct natural entity – are also linked to the mainland by geology as an extension of Andalucía's Cordillera Penibética mountain range.

The brisk winter carries through February, with the occasional tempting lapses known as the *calmos de enero*, during which the winds and the cold subside and an ethereal calm and color settles upon these islands. Ibiza, to the southwest, and the smaller Formentera, are noticeably drier, enduring months of rainless weather that begins in earnest in June, after the spring season has swept beyond the islands, taking with it the colorful blooms of the olive and almond trees. Something like 75% of Europe's yearly almond harvest comes from these trees. The rains, which the islands are always short on, gradually return in October, once the four to five million tourists who descend on them each summer have returned to their own towns and cities. Then the islands, at least in some respects, return to the way they once must have been.



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Each of the islands has suffered and yet flourished differently in the wake of the tourists. Mallorca, and particularly its capital of Palma, has been most obviously affected. English and German words are more commonly heard in the streets than Mallorquí or Spanish. Accordingly, menu selections at restaurants in the busiest tourist centers tend to reflect the eating habits of these other European countries. Along the southern beaches where there are no mountains to fend off the feverish developers, miles of dime-a-dozen resort hotels line the blue seafront like a bad choice of eye shadow.

Ibiza has its own demographic; it has been called one great open-air disco, and in fact many among the older crowds have sworn off this island, just as the young revelers have Mallorca because of its more mature crowd.

Menorca is perhaps the least altered among the three largest islands, due largely to its stark, but nonetheless beautiful scenery and, perhaps, to the lack of much to do other than enjoy nature and the rural traditions that are slowly disappearing from the island.

■ Island Festivals

One of the more grandiose events on the islands is the celebration of **San Antonio** in Mallorca, highlighted by huge bonfires during mid-January. The Balearics are famous for their fine riding ponies. On each of the islands, but particularly on Menorca, traditional festivals celebrate the horse and its rider. The celebrations of **San Juan** in Ciutadella mark the beginning of just such a celebration in Menorca. These fall toward the end of June, but carry on intermittently throughout the rest of the summer.

■ Gastronomy

The cuisine of the islands is similar to that of Cataluña or Valencia – an emphasis on pork, lots of *sobrasada* (like chopped Southern barbeque but more tart), and perfectly prepared fried fish and rice dishes. Specialties of the island include its many soups and the *pa amb oli* (simply toasted French bread with a spread of fresh tomatoes, salt and olive oil – eaten at all hours of the day). Mention should be made of the famous Mahón cheese from the milk of cows on the island of Menorca, and of that island's home-brewed gin.

■ Getting to the Islands

By Air: Flights from mainland Spain to the Balearic Islands are relatively cheap and easy to come by, particularly for Mallorca and, to a lesser extent, Ibiza and Menorca. Expect to pay around 100€ for a round-trip ticket purchased in advance, or upwards of 150€ the morning of. Tickets can be purchased in a short amount of time (so long as there isn't a line) at any of the travel agencies of Spain.

> **Be Careful:** These tickets are often non-refundable and date changes aren't allowed. If you miss the flight, or arrive later than the one-hour pre-arrival time, they may not let you on the plane – and the airline definitely won't exchange your ticket for a later one.

For the islands' airport information, contact the following: **Mallorca** *(Palma, ☎ 97 126 08 03)*; **Menorca** *(Mahón, ☎ 97 115 71 15)*; **Ibiza** *(☎ 97 180 90 00)*.

By Sea: If you aren't in a hurry and would welcome the chance to cruise across the Mediterranean, a ferry from the mainland is the way to go. These run from both Barcelona and Valencia to the islands of Mallorca, Menorca and Ibiza. Once on the islands, separate ferry services shuttle from one to the next.

> **TIP:** If you plan to use the ferries to bounce between the islands, make plans and reservations well in advance. With just a week or so to spend on the island, the idea that you can just fly or ferry over, then catch one of the "frequent" ferries to see the other islands just isn't so. In the high season these are often full, and throughout the year they don't always run at convenient times.

Both **Buquebus** *(☎ 97 140 09 69)* and **Transmediterranea** (☎ *90 245 46 45)* run ferry services. Expect to pay around 40€ each way.

Mallorca

This is Western Europe's great vacation getaway, where in the last 40 years the tourism industry has all but replaced traditional livelihoods to account for some 80% of the island's economy. The largest and most populous of the Balearic Islands, Mallorca sees the greatest influx of foreigners each season – some four million, weighed against just 340,000 local islanders. To legions of regular visitors and notable expatriates including George Sand, Robert Graves, Luis Salvador and, more recently, Michael Douglas, some of the attractions are: the exclusivity of the northeastern coast; the secluded, sandy coves (*calas*) known to the locals and maybe a handful of tourists; the freedom and status afforded by the sailboats of its largest ports; the peace and solitude in walking, biking, or hiking through the rocky mountainside of the northern Sierra de Tramuntana that spans 90 km (56 miles) between Andratx and Formentor. Etched long ago into layers of manmade terraces that now sprout wild, unkempt olive trees, this mountain range has been largely abandoned in the recent past by its farmers who, either for an easier existence or a cheaper one, have moved to the windmill-speckled *El Pla*, the island's central agrarian plain, where they make what money they can in cultivating figs, cereals and almonds.

Around this fertile plain, which can be stunning with the bloom of almond trees and red poppies, Mallorca encompasses a range of geographical extremes. While the north of the island, with its high coastal cliffs and mountainsides thick with forests of holm oak and pine (the last refuge of Europe's largest bird, the black vulture) receives moderate rainfall, the southern coast is flat, noted for its dry weather and many beaches. The northeast coast is distinguished from these regions by its coastal sand dunes and the S'Albufera wetlands, a natural park frequented by birdwatchers and hikers north of the large bay of Alcúdia,

■ Tourism Information

If arriving by air, stop by the small tourism office in the airport for basic information and maps *(☎ 97 178 95 56)*. Shuttles from the airport arrive at the Placa Espanya, where another tourism office is located *(Parc de les Estacions, ☎ 97 175 43 29)*. In the city of Palma, the main office just off the Placa Reina is staffed by a haughty old is-

lander who seems to detest serving the very tourists who provide work for him *(Consell de Mallorca, Placa de la Reina 2, ☎ 971 71 22 16)*. Friendlier services offering the same brochures and info are located within a few blocks of this plaza, one on the corner of C/ Constitucio and Passeig des Born, the other at C/ Sant Domingo 11 *(☎ 97 172 40 90)*. A numbered series of 10 pamphlets is available at each of these offices for free, with information on museums and monuments, rental car agencies, hikes, island holidays, traditional cafés and so on.

English language **guided tours** of Palma's historical port area begin in the Placa Reina each day at 10:30 am, last approximately two hours and cost 6€. The same guide service also offers tours of the Jewish quarter, which begin at the same time and place. For bookings, call ☎ 63 643 00 00.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: Mallorca's international Aeropuerto de Son Sant Joan hosts arrivals and departures from Spanish airports as well as most other major European cities. If arriving from Barcelona or Valencia, check with the local travel agencies there at least one day in advance of departure to receive the best deals on flights. Expect to pay around 100€. It is nine km (5½ miles) southeast of the capital city via the PM-19 *autovia* in the direction of Santañy. Public transport to and from the airport includes taxis, which take roughly 15 minutes each way, and the cheaper and more practical #1 and #17 bus, which run to and from the Placa España in Palma every half-hour or so from 7 am to 8 pm.

- Airport Information line, ☎ 97 178 90 00
- Iberia, ☎ 97 126 26 00
- Spanair, ☎ 97 174 50 20
- Air Europa, ☎ 90 240 15 01
- Air France, ☎ 97 171 35 00
- Lufthansa, ☎ 90 222 01 01
- British Airways, ☎ 97 178 77 37

By Sea: **Transmediterránea** operates regular ferries to and from Barcelona, Valencia, Ibia and Menorca. Check the schedules on their website *(www.trasmediterranea.es)* and, if possible, purchase the tickets well in advance *(Estació Marítima 2, Moll de Paraires, ☎ 90 245 46 45)*. Other ferry companies operating out of Mallorca include **Balearia** *(☎ 90 216 01 80, www.balearia.es)*, **Umafisar** *(☎ 97 131 02 01)* and **Turbocat** *(☎ 90 216 01 80)*.

By Bus: If traveling the island by bus, it is wise to check in at one of the tourism offices listed below for timetables and departure locations, which can vary. The main bus station and most departures are just down C/ Eusebi Estada from the train station in the **Parc de Se Estacions**, which is directly across C/ Joan March from the busy Placa de España. Check timetables at the small tourist information kiosk located in the park.

By Train: The **Serveis Ferroviaris de Mallorca (SFM)** train *(Placa Espanya 6, Palma, ☎ 97 175 22 45)*, otherwise known as the Inca train, runs from the Placa d'Espanya in Palma, skirting the southern lee of the Tramuntana mountain range as it cuts through the heart of the agrarian center of the island. Stops are numerous along the way, the last of which is in the

village of Sa Pobla. The **Tren de Sóller** *(☎ 97 175 20 51, www.trendesoller.com)* is popular with tourists as its 100-year-old mini-train cars cut a scenic swath through the heart of the Tramuntana mountain range en route to Bunyola and the busy village of Sóller. The train departs from the Placa d'Espanya.

Palma-Sóller Departures

- Feb.-Oct., six daily, the first at 8 am and the last at 7:15 pm
- Nov.-Jan., five departures daily, the first at 8 am and the last at 7:15 pm

Sóller-Palma Departures

- Feb.-March, six daily, the first at 8 am and the last at 6:15 pm
- April-Oct., eight daily, the first at 8 am and the last at 7:15 pm
- Nov.-Jan., five daily, the first at 8 am and the last at 7:15 pm

This is the easiest way to get around the island is by **car**, and it's relatively cheap to rent a small car. The major car rental companies maintain offices both in the capital city, particularly along the stretch of the Passeig Marítim (also called the Passeig Sagrera) that skirts the port dockyards, and at the airport – though for the latter you'll definitely need reservations in the high season and should expect to wait in ridiculously long lines even so. The prices vary considerably, so check with more than one office if budget-minded.

Agencies on the Passeig Marítim include:

- Hertz, #13, ☎ 97 173 47 37
- Avis, #16, ☎ 97 173 07 20
- Betacar, #19, ☎ 97 145 24 62

■ Adventures on Foot

Hiking

The north of Mallorca, in and around the Sierra de Tramuntana, is laced with hiking trails. In fact, it is one of the more beautiful spots in Spain to set out on foot and hike from the western resorts to the mountain villages and along the coastal cliffs. The tourist board prints a small pamphlet called *"20 Excursions on Foot in Mallorca."* Unfortunately, its descriptions are short and directions ambiguous. With this pamphlet in hand, we caught a public bus from Palma to Camp de Mar, then set out on foot to make the 12-km (7½-mile) hike to Sa Mola listed as #1 in the pamphlet. Within no time we were lost and ended up on the narrow main road to Port d'Andratx, where there wasn't much room to share with the cars. We got lost, then lost some more, but it was a terrific hike nonetheless. Just use the pamphlet as a recommendation, not as a guide. A better choice to carry with you is June Parker's book *Walking in Mallorca*.

The **Dry Stone Route**, an on-going government-recuperation project of the ancient village trails through the Sierra de Tramuntana, should be well sign-posted once it is complete (thus rendering that pamphlet more worthless than it already is). The trail, parts of which are complete (check with the tourism board for accessibility before heading out), runs from Andratx in the west, through the mountain villages, to Pollenca in the east, with mountain *refugios* in Escorca and Sóller for overnight stops along the way.

Caving

Mallorca is full of caves, many of which have been retrofitted with lights, speakers and guides ready to welcome tourists. There are said to be 800 of these water-carved limestone caves on the island, though only a handful are open to the public: **Campanent**, **Génova**, **Drac**, **Hams** and **Artà**. Besides Lake Martel, which is claimed to be the largest subterranean lake in Europe, the caves of Drac and Hams are most frequented by tourists. Both have guided canoe tours. Drac, however, also has frequent live classical music performances. Drac is south of Porto Cristo in the direction of the Calas de Mallorca PMV 401-4. Hams is in Portocristo *(Ctra Porto Cristo-Mancor, ☎ 82 09 88)*. Artà is another cave of this type, located in Canyamel *(Ctra de las Cueva, s/n, ☎ 97 184 12 93)*.

■ Adventures on Wheels

Biking

Biking routes on the island include the **Camí del Torrente de Coa Negra**, a trail created originally to join the villages of Santa Maria and Orient. Another well-worn trail is the **Mola de Planici** running between Banyalbufar and Esporles. Cycling is also a good way to explore the marshes of **La Reserva Natural de S'Albufera** in the east. If you've ever driven through the **Sierra de Tramuntana**, you'll know to be particularly cautious if biking its hilly, narrow and curvy mountain roads.

Riding the Rails

The famous **Tren de Sóller** has been running tourists and commuters between the city of Palma and the pretty mountain town of Sóller since 1912. It takes around an hour for the electric engines to push the wooden carriages as far as Sóller, along the way passing through orange and olive groves, winding up and around the sides of mountains and through tunnel after tunnel. And it's worth it, though during the high season the train will be stuffy and the normally peaceful town of Sóller more so. From this village, a second train runs to the port, where boat trips are offered to the stunning gorge of La Calobra, known as the **Torrent de Pareis** (for ticket information see the section on Sóller, page 600).

■ Adventures on Water

The secluded coves of Mallorca make for terrific sea kayaking destinations. Guide companies in most of the major resort areas lead trips, sometimes overnight, and rent kayaks for private use. In Palma, check with **Piraguas GM** *(C/ Curtixó 30, ☎ 60 980 62 36)*, which organizes trips around the island and rents canoes for 20€ per person for four hours.

On the northeastern rim of the island in Alcúdia, **Océano Sub** also rents kayaks and doubles as a scuba diving shop. The diving is good in this area of Mallorca, though some feel it is better to the west around Port d'Andratx.

■ The Capital City of Palma

As the largest city of the Balearic archipelago, the seat of its autonomous government, site of its biggest and busiest port, center of its commerce and its

most visited destination, this is the big city, relatively speaking. Though not as fast-tracked as most mainland Spanish cities, it is easy to forget while here that outside the city there are beaches and beautiful, sunny open spaces. That its own beach is not even within comfortable walking distance from the city center seems to underscore its role as the serious, responsible elder of the Balearics.

History

Palma is one of the oldest communities in the islands, founded by the Roman Quintus Cecillius Metellus in 123 BC. It came under Moorish dominion beginning in 903 AD after they had run out the Byzantines in 903, who had run out the Vandals in 534, who had previously run out the Romans around 455. Under King Jaume I, the Christians recaptured Palma from the Moors in 1229, renamed it the Ciutat de Mallorca and made it the seat of the Kingdom of Mallorca. This period of commercial prosperity through its sea trade with Barcelona, Valencia, North Africa and Europe lasted well beyond the year 1343, when Pedro IV of Aragon invaded the island, effectively annexing it to the Kingdom of Aragon. With that kingdom's later unification with Castile in the crusade against the Moors, the city and island became part of the emerging Spanish country.

Orientation

Unless you've rented a car and picked it up at the airport, arrivals to Palma typically begin in the bustling but less than interesting Placa Espanya next to the bus and train stations, which is often considered the heart of contemporary Palma.

The most rewarding path to the city's historical core and port is via the **Porta Pintada**, which connects to the store-lined pedestrian street **Sant Miquel**, at which you should make a left and follow to its culmination at the vast, rectangular **Placa Major**, hemmed by arcades and often crowded with vendors hawking a myriad of cheap local and exotic crafts. From the smaller **Placa Marques Palmer** just beyond and to the south of this main plaza, **Carrer Platería** courses through the evocative **Barrio Hebreo Call**, the old Jewish quarter. From this same plaza there are any number of ways to reach the central artery, **Passeig des Born**, which spans from the Placa Rei Joan Carles I to the Placa Reina nearer to the water and the Catedral. For less carbon monoxide inhalation and noise pollution, walk down **Carrer Jaume II** to reach the **Placa Rosari** and the beginning of elegant **Carrer Conquistador**. It runs as far as the **Placa Reina**, the heart of Palma's old quarter.

The streets called **Apuntadors** and **Pintor G. Mesquida** dive into the narrow, evocative confines of Palma's original *barrio*, a favorite haunt of tourists clamoring for its cheap accommodations, bars and mid-range restaurants. From the Placa Reina, the **Avinguda d'Antoni Maura** runs by this zone to the **Passeig Maritim**, a two-lane road paralleled by a pedestrian trail which traces the shoreline around Palma's notorious port and marinas.

Sightseeing

Catedral o la Seu: From the outside, Palma's 14th-century Gothic cathedral is undeniably impressive, with its uniform buttresses, the kaleidoscopic rose windows designed by Antoni Gaudí as part of an early 20th-century restoration, its pinnacles and the

grand belfry hung with the giant N'Eloi bell. It weighs 11,000 lbs. All is reflected in the adjacent waters of the city's Parc de Mar. Passing through the original 14th-century Gothic Portal del Mirador, the broad transept and apse open up, adorned with a mural by Miró, sculptures by Guinovart, and flanked by 18 chapels, of which the Capella de la Santíssima Trinitat is the oldest and most foot-worn home of the tombs of the Mallorcan Kings. *(Open Mon.-Sat. 10 am-6:30 pm.)*

Palau de l'Almudaina: Today the official residence of the Spanish Royal family when on the island, this palace adjacent to the Catedral o la Seu was originally built as a fortress and residence of the Moorish Walis Caliphate that ruled the island during the 11th through the 13th centuries. By the 14th century, with the Moors vanquished, King Jaime II retrofitted the compound to serve as his palace. The Gothic and Renaissance interior details reflect the prevailing Christian tastes even as the Mudéjar exterior preserves the style of the palace's founders. *(C/ Palau Reial, s/n, ☎ 97 121 41 34; open Oct.-Mar. Mon.-Fri. 10 am-2 pm and 4-6 pm, Sat. 10 am-2 pm; April-Sept. Mon.-Fri. 10 am-6:30 pm, Sat. 10 am-2 pm; entry 3.16€.)*

Castell de Bellver: Housing the **Museu d'Història de la Ciutat**, this 14th-century Gothic edifice conforms to a unique circular floor plan bolstered by four watch towers and shot through by a two-tiered central courtyard from its vista-perfect hillside perch overlooking the city. The castle was commissioned by King Jaume II to serve as a summer residence, though for most of its history until as recently as 1910 it served as Mallorca's main prison. Inside, a considerable trove of artifacts traces the island's history. *(☎ 97 173 06 57; open Oct.-Mar. Mon.-Sat. 8 am-7:15 pm, Sun. 10 am-5 pm; April-Sept. Mon.-Sat. 8 am-8:30 pm, Sun. 10 am-5 pm; entry 1.68€.)*

Fundación Pilar y Joan Miró: Here aspiring artists find tutelage and inspiration, up-and-comers find space to display their creations in revolving exhibitions, and the man responsible for, at the least, the art center's reputation enjoys a decent allotment of display space for his own works. *(C/ Joan de Saridakis 29, ☎ 97 170 14 20; open May 15-Sept. 15 Tues.-Sat. 10 am-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; Sept 16-May 14 Tues.-Sat. 10 am-6 pm, Sun. 10 am-3 pm; entry 4.30€).*

Museu de Mallorca: Island artifacts and etymological traceries are on exhibit in this 17th-century mansion. *(Calle de Portella 5, ☎ 71 75 40; open Oct.-Mar. Tues.-Sat. 10 am-1 pm and 3-6 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm; April-Sept. Tues.-Sat. 10 am-2 pm and 5-7 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm; entry 1.80€.)*

Banys Arabs: Along with the palace of Almudaina, the 10th-century Arabic baths off Calle de Serra are all that survive to bear testimony to the centuries of Moorish rule that ended in the 13th century with the arrival of King Jaume I. Sadly, little of the baths have stood the test of time save for a sad grouping of arches, vaults and a few straggling columns.

Poble Espaynol: A tourist attraction, if not a tourist trap, Palma's Spanish Village does make for an insightful tour of traditional Spanish peninsular architecture. Some sights to look out for are replicas of Granada's Arabic baths and salons of the Alhambra palace, Sevilla's Torre del Oro (Tower of Gold) and El Greco's former residence in Toledo. *(Carrer del Poble Espanyol, s/n, ☎ 97 173 15 92, open 9am-7 pm.)*

Archangel (1400-1450), La Lonja

La Lonja (Sa Llotja): Back in the 15th century, while Palma flourished at the center of a highly profitable and influential Mediterranean sea trade, this Gothic edifice was created to serve as a merchant training center and employment office. Most spectacular are its fluted columns, which rise to the vaulted ceiling and splay out as ribs designed to emulate the fronds of six palm trees. The architect Guillermo Sagrera's symbol-laden creation now serves as a seafaring museum. Next door, the 17th-century edifice of the **Consolat de Mar** preserves the mystique of the merchant trade tribunal first established in the 14th century to deal with, dispute, and delegate verdicts on maritime issues. Today the Renaissance edifice is occupied by the offices of the Majorcan Prime Minister and Balearic Government *(Passeig de Guillem Sagrera-Placa de la Llotja 5)*.

Shopping

There is no shortage of entertainment opportunities in Palma. Shopping is good on **Calle de San Miguel**, where cultured pearls from Manacor, pottery from Portol and the island's traditional hand-blown glass can be purchased.

Open-air markets with food, crafts and junk are held regularly in the **Placa Olivar** *(open Mon.-Sat. 7 am-2 pm)*, the **Placa de les Meravelles** *(from May 15-Oct. 15, 8 pm-12am)* and the **Placa Major** *(10 am-2 pm on Friday and Saturday)*.

Nightlife

Cultural performances such as opera and theater are held in the historical **Teatro Principal** during springtime *(La Riera 2A, ☎ 971 72 55 48)* and musical and film festivals in Palma's concert hall, home of the **Balearic Symphony Orchestra** *(Paseo Marítimo 18, ☎ 73 47 35)*.

Nightlife is good for young partiers in the area around **La Llotja** and **Consulado del Mar**. Discos are numerous along the **Paseo Marítimo**. Or head to **Plaza Gomila** and **S'Arenal** area to dance the night away.

Adventures on Water

Sailing

Each year Palma hosts three significant regattas. There is the prestigious **Copa del Rey de Vela** during the first week of August, which has grown since its inception in the early 1980s to attract hundreds of top cruisers from around the world, as well as the participation of King Juan Carlos. Then there is the **Trofeo S.A.R. Princesa Sofia** held in the wintertime. And finally comes the **Trofeo Almirante Conde de Barcelona** in August, where restored vintage yachts vie for speed and aesthetic awards. Information on these competitions as well as available sailing berths can be obtained from the **Federación Balear de Vela** *(☎ 971 40 24 12)*, the **Real Club Nàutic de Palma** *(Moll de Sant Pere 1, ☎ 97 172 68 48)* and the **Escuela Nacional de Vela de Calanova** *(Avda Joan Miró, ☎ 971 40 25 12)*.

Beaches

The nearest beach is the Playa de Palma, a 5½-km (3.4-mile) strand lined with discos, pubs, terrace restaurants and a waterpark. Somewhere in there is a beach as well. Walking from the city center takes around 15 minutes. The alternative is to flag a taxi or catch one of the buses heading east around the port from one of the stops on the Paseo Maritimo.

Where to Stay

Just behind the Catedral and Parc de la Mar, ☆☆☆☆☆ **Palacio Ca Sa Galessa** *(C/ Miramar 8, ☎ 97 171 54 00, fax 97 172 15 79, d 275€)* offers extravagant amenities. From its 17th-century rooms (each named for a famous classical musician), views of the bay are unsurpassed. The hotel has an indoor swimming pool and, more interestingly, a reconstructed Roman bath in its basement. To experience a little of old-world Spain for less *dinero*, book a room in the ☆☆ **Hotel Born** *(C/ San Jaume 3, ☎ 97 171 29 42, d 110€)*, occupying a 16th-century Gothic palace that originally belonged to the Marquis of Ferrandell. The accommodations are slightly rustic, but this just seems to add to the experience. The palm-shaded patio is a great place to read the morning newspaper and sip café con leche. Located in the heart of the Palma's historical area just off the Placa de la Reina, the **Hostal Ritzi** *(C/ Apuntadores 6, ☎ 97 171 46 10, s 30€)* has sparse, relatively clean rooms, some with and some without private bath. Beds aren't great, but the downstairs Internet café is a plus. Next door the **Hostal Apuntadores** *(C/ Apuntadores 8, ☎ 97 171 34 91, s 30€)* is about the same as far as quality goes, though it does have a dinky café inside (eat elsewhere).

Camping

The two campsite of Mallorca are near the flat, eastern coast. **Club San Pedro** outside the village of Artá has facilities including showers, a small market store, camper hook-ups, a swimming pool

and a cafeteria *(Cala dels Camps-Colonia de San Pedro, ☎ 97 158 90 23)*. Inland from the Bahía de Alcúdia, **Sun Club Picafort** is better maintained and offers far more facilities, as well as supplies, guides and information about adventure trips on the island *(Ctra Artá-Pto. Alcúdia, km 23.4, ☎ 97 186 00 02)*.

What to Eat & Where

Overlooking the harbor, the chefs at upscale **Koldo Royo** fuse Basque cuisine with typical Mediterranean cuisine. While you won't find traditional island dishes like *sobrasada* (a tangy, heavily sauced shredded beef) or roast pork on the menu, the few considerate, creative dishes and the sizeable wine list are a welcome change *(Paseo Marítimo 3, ☎ 97 173 24 35)*. A number of restaurants are located along the Correr dels Apuntadores off the Placa de la Reina. **La Cueva, Hnos. Nietos** serves sizable *raciones* in a traditional Spanish setting. On the opposite side of the street are two more upscale and somewhat trendy restaurants. **La Paloma** specializes in creative continental fare and **Forn de Sant Joan** offers a variety of wild game dishes. To keep it authentic and avoid the tourist crush, go underground at the **Celler Montenegro**. Traditional island peasant dishes, as well as seafood and local wines are served at a bargain price compared with much of the island. Expect to pay under 15€ per person for dinner *(C/ Montenegro 10)*.

■ Villages of the Sierra de Tramuntana

In the winding heights of this mountain range, a network of scenic hiking trails links the mountain villages to each other and the Mediterranean Sea. On the beaten path, the mountain roads are in exceptional condition, but narrow and constantly winding. Watch out for mountain bikers (and if you're one of them, watch out for cars) and speeding motor bikes. At almost every turn there seems to be a *mirador* where one can park the car and take in the surroundings of the green interior valleys or the jagged, barren cliffs of the Costa Nord.

Valldemossa

A great deal of romanticism is attached to Valldemossa in the Tramuntana Mountains. No doubt it is one of the prettiest villages on the island, a terraced setting of hewn-stone homes surrounding the Moorish minaret of the old Franciscan monastery, laced through and trimmed by the colors of the valley's almond, olive and fig trees. In 1836 the French novelist George Sand (1804-1876), an avowed feminist who scandalized France with her independently-minded novels, plays and conduct, spent the winter in Valldemosa with her children and lover, the Polish pianist and composer Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849). The story of that winter was immortalized in Sand's *A Winter in Mallorca*; despite some contempt among the locals at the time it was published, the love story lives on and it is a rare afternoon in Valldemosa that some mention isn't made of its protagonist. Writers, and it seems particularly foreign writers on Spain, wield a mighty power over the future of a place with their words. Sand has

made Valldemosa, what had been up until her time simply a quiet mountain village a short way from Palma, a point of interest to foreigners, who otherwise might never have known about it. Brenan did the same for the Alpujarras, Irving for the Alhambra, Orwell for Cataluña, and Michener and Ford for the country as a whole. Without our own writers, the Spaniards would have only their own words and opinions about these places. Sometimes it takes an outsider to see what truly makes the inside valuable.

George Sand

So Sand and Chopin spent a winter in the bleak cells of the 16th-century **Cartuja de Valldemosa**, which at that time had been abandoned by its monks. Inside, there is quite a lot to see, including frescoes by Goya's brother-in-law Miguel Bayeu, works by Tàpies, Miró, and Mallorcan artist Juli Ramis, as well as a 17th-century monks' pharmacy and the prior's cell, since converted into a museum and library. During the summer, piano concerts are held in the monastery's cloister, where one can see and here the "Pleyel" piano brought by Chopin from France.

It is impossible to miss the glossy flyers with Michael Douglas' picture stacked on every countertop in Mallorca. These advertise the **Costa Nord Cultural Centre** *(Avda Palma, 6, ☎ 97 161 24 25, www.costanord.com)* ensconced in one of Valldemosa's historical buildings; the Centre has been set-up to inform outsiders of the natural and manmade heritage of Mallorca's northern coast. To this end there is a virtual yacht tour hosted by Michael Douglas, the center's benefactor and a long-time admirer and part-time resident of Mallorca's northern coast. In this video tour you'll learn quite a lot about the Austrian Archduke Luis Salvador who, after leaving the court behind, began to travel the world and found and fell in love with this area of Mallorca. A museum devoted to the Archduke's writings and other work which has been meticulously acquired through the years by German historian Peter Kroll-Vogel is in the coastal town of Son Marroig just north of Valldemosa.

Deià

Robert Graves

Like Valldemosa, neighboring Deià has been influenced considerably through the attention given to it by artists and those fond of tracing their paths. On advice from the writer Gertrude Stein, the English poet Robert Graves traveled to Deià in 1929, where he spent much of the rest of his life living among the locals. Something about this village seated in a rocky mountainside bowl just inland from the sea has continued to entice artists in the time since Graves was buried in the graveyard of the town's Catholic church. Though he was not of the prevailing Spanish faith, the author of, most notably, *I, Claudius*, had developed such a rapport with the locals that they were proud to lay him among their own, beneath a headstone that reads, "Robert Graves Poeta." Among the other artists to have followed Graves' lead are Anthony Burgess, Richard Hughes and the Nobel Prize-winning Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, whose novel *One*

Hundred Years of Solitude has enjoyed a late resurgence in popularity thanks to Oprah's reinitiated book club.

In the village there is the incessant sound of water trickling down from the mountain, past the limestone homes, in the direction of the ocean. A few terrace bars and restaurants are scattered around the village; these are great in early spring before most tourists have arrived, but, like the little town, usually full and bustling later in the year. The streams of mountain water feed into the ocean not far from the **Cala de Deià**, a cove beyond which is a rocky nude beach known to locals as "the Naked and the Dead."

Sóller

One of the larger towns of the Tramuntana Mountains, Sóller lacks the quaint subtlety of the surrounding villages. Unlike its neighbors, Sóller has been privileged to have been linked since the turn of the 20th century with the city of Palma by what was the island's only train. With it came prosperity enough to create Modernist façades like that of the Banco Sóller and the local church, both designed by the Gaudí protégé Rubió i Bellver. Foreign transplants built palatial homes and, gradually, as more and more tourists came to visit, the population reached 100,000. The **Tren de Sóller**, a beautiful scenic rail jaunt from the capital city through the mountain valleys to Sóller and back, runs throughout the year, every half-hour during high season and every hour during the other months. From Sóller a train continues on to the **Port de Sóller**, which is a short half-hour walk otherwise. Once there, boat trips are offered to the **Torrent de Pareis in La Calobra**, a canyon frequented by sightseers and explored by serious hikers. A few different companies run these boats, though most leave around mid-morning *(☎ 97 163 01 70, www.barcosazules.com)*. If you've somehow missed the boat and are just itching to hike, a signposted trail from the port leads to the lighthouse "Far des Cap Gros," a little under an hour's hike away. There the **Refugi de Muleta** *(☎ 97 163 42 71)* offers dorm rooms and serves meals for a pittance compared with the rest of the island.

■ Where to Stay

You'll find more hotels around the port areas of the Sierra de Tramuntana, particularly that of Sóller, than you will inland in the mountains. To stay on the water near Sóller, try the ☆☆ **Hotel El Marina** *(☎ 97 163 14 61)*. In the town of Sóller choices include the ☆☆☆ **Hotel Monte Azul** *(☎ 97 163 15 11)* and the **Hostal Nadal** *(☎ 97 163 11 80, d 30€)*.

In Deià, the **Hotel D'es Puig** *(C/ Es Pulg 4, ☎ 97 163 94 09, d 100€)* has long been a favorite retreat for the artsy types who flock to this village. The historical building is located in the center of Deía and offers simple, but comfortable rooms with private balconies and bath. This is the cheaper substitute for Deía's popular 16th-century **Hotel La Residincia** *(C/ Son Canals, ☎ 97 163 90 11, d 300€)*, the immaculate 16th-century residence since converted into one of Spain's finest hotels.

■ What to Eat & Where

Word of **Restaurante El Guía** *(C/ Castanyer 2, ☎ 97 163 02 27)* has only recently begun to filter beyond the ears of Mallorca's locals. Like a great Mexican restaurant in a run-down trailer house, El Guía's décor is not meant to impress. It is the food that is excep-

tional, a cross between typical *campesino* cuisine and Mediterranean styles with a touch of French flare. Expect to pay 10-20€ per person.

In Deía, both Hotel D'es Puig and the more renowned Hotel La Residencia have superb restaurants serving Mallorcan fare at dress-smart prices. As the locals will recommend, **El Olivo** *(C/ Son Canals, ☎97 163 90 11)* in the latter hotel is one of Mallorca's most respected restaurants, if not the one. The dishes are distinctly mod-Med, bold, creative and yet, no-nonsense, like the simple dish of salted asparagus with filet of rabbit. As with the hotel, El Olivo is a casual, dress-smart kind of place.

Menorca

This island of sand and stone is the easternmost of the Balearic archipelago and the only one that is not a Mediterranean extension of the mainland's Cordillera Penibética Mountains. Scenery here, as a result, is markedly different from neighboring Mallorca. Aside from the low, piney central mountain, the terrain is characterized by gently rolling hills with fields cordoned off from one another by fieldstone fences traditionally painted white across their tops. The northern, more fertile realm of the island is thick with pine trees and devoid of any major tourism centers. Farther south, farmers tend barley and oat crops and the mysterious prehistoric stone *talaiots*, the prehistoric stone monuments common to Mallorca; in contrast, the south is a realm where exposed calcareous bedrock, tall cliffs and beach resorts are more common.

In the colder months the Tramuntana winds howl over the island, often unbearably so. Throughout the year, even without the wind, this island is a nod colder than the other Balearic Islands.

Menorca has not been affected by tourism as thoroughly as Mallorca and Ibiza have. With the exception of the wind, things tend to move slowly on this small island (so small, in fact, that it can be crossed from east to west by car in under half an hour). The locals are generally reserved and still, in many cases, dependant on the land for their cash crops and agriculture. For the traveler, the island offers countless undisturbed beach coves and casual coastal villages that reflect its heritage, of Spanish and British occupation in whitewashed walls and colonial facades, and in the signs of its traditional fishing industry.

■ History

Since medieval times, control of the island has bounced back and forth between the British and Spaniards. Appropriated in 123 BC by Quintus Caecilus Metellus, though never completely brought under Roman dominion, Menorca fell into the Vandals' hands in the sixth century and by the 10th century had been incorporated into the Caliphate of Córdoba, a period in which the Moors were known to use the island as a staging ground for pirate attacks on the mainland. Following the King Jaume I-led conquest of the island in 1232, Menorca became part of the Kingdom of Cataluña and, despite Redbeard and his Berber Corsairs' destructive foray across the island in 1535, remained tenuously in the Kingdom until the Spanish War of Succession in 1708. Under the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 at the end of the war, King Felipe V ceded the island to Britain. A period of commercial prosperity ensued, then waned as the issue of ownership became a

messy, all-consuming one. The island passed into the control of the French during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), fell back to the British under the Treaty of Paris (1763), to the Spanish, with French help, in 1782, and then was reclaimed by Britain in 1798 during its war with Spain. Finally, with the signing of the Peace of Amiens in 1802, Britain agreed to exchange control of Menorca to Spain in return for Trinidad.

■ Tourist Information

A booth is staffed for tourist information at the **airport in Mahón** *(☎ 97 115 71 15)*. That city's main tourist office is located in the **Plaza Explanada** *(☎ 97 136 37 90)*. In **Ciutadella de Menorca**, the tourist office is in the Plaza de la Catedral *(☎ 97 138 26 93)*.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: From Mahón/Mao, the airport is a few kilometers southwest, accessible via the PM-704. Both Spanish and international flights are hosted. Taxis are the easiest way of traveling between the city and airport *(☎ 97 115 71 15)*.

By Sea: **Transmediterranea** *(Muelle Comercial, ☎ 95 650 53 90)*, **Balearia** *(☎ 90 216 01 80, www.balearia.es)*, **Iscomar** and **Turbocat** each operate regular ferries between the islands and the mainland. While these are more frequent during the high season, it is generally harder to get a seat on them at these times without a prior ticket purchase. Reservations can be made by phone, Internet or at the respective port offices. Ferries to neighboring Mallorca depart the Port de Ciutadella, or stop in the Port de Ciutadella if arriving from the easternmost Port de Maó en route to Mallorca.

By Bus: Traveling Menorca by bus is more trouble than it is worth. **Autocares Torres Allés** does handle the main destinations on the island, but generally renting a car is the best option.

By Car: Besides the major international car rental companies represented on the island, the Spanish-run **Recar Touristic s.l.** *(☎ 97 191 94 94, operations@regamallorca.com)* won't put you through as many hurdles and its prices are generally as low as low gets, which isn't all that low. Another Spanish-run agency is **Menorca Rent-a-Car** *(☎ 97 136 01 47, www.menorcarent.com)*, which, like the others, maintains an office at the airport in Mahón. The price may be a shocker: upwards of €100 per day.

■ The Capital City of Mahón (Maó)

As far as Mediterranean seafarers have been concerned down through the ages, Mahón is one of those idyllic places. It is situated at the inland head of a narrow, deep harbor that burrows far into the island. In shape it is similar to the fjord-like *rías* of Galicia, though without all the green. The largest natural harbor of the Mediterranean, it is both easily defensible and navigable, features that attracted Phoenician seafarers to found a settlement here in the ninth century BC. And still the natural protection could not thwart a Turkish invasion in the 15th century led by the infamous Redbeard that led to the death of half the town's population. Colonized by the British in the 18th century, Mahón began to bounce back after years of neglect.

Through its British influence, Mahón has developed into a quite distinct Spanish city. Its harbor is terraced with attractive, 18th-century colo-

nial-style homes. It is known throughout the country for its queso Mahon, a cheese of milk from a breed of cattle introduced by the British. And one of its locals' favorite cocktails is the *pomade*, a gin and lemon Fanta concoction, the gin having been first distilled in Mahón by the British for British soldiers. Some even say that mayonnaise was invented in Mahón, though no one knows for sure.

Mahón has a bustling entertainment scene, day and night, around the storefronts, bars and restaurants of its harbor. From the harbor, the main **Carrer ses Moreres** cuts through town, past the historical district. One of the finest places in town, the **Placa Conquesta** is the site of the 13th-century **Iglesia de Santa María**, a Gothic-Neoclassical edifice and, across from it, the immaculate 17th-century **Casa Consistorial** (Town Hall). The island's **Museu de Menorca** occupies the cloister of a former Franciscan monastery next to the city's other popular site, the **Iglesia de San Francisco**. The museum houses archeological relics that trace the island's past cultures, from the Christians down to the Moors, the Romans, Phoenicians and the prehistoric Talayotic culture whose ceremonial stone structures are common features of the Menorcan landscape.

On a lighter note, the **Destileria Xoriguer** *(Andén de Poniente 91, ☎ 97 136 21 97)*, one of Mahón's oldest and most respected gin distilleries dating to the 18th century, allows tours, samples and, of course, purchases of its intoxicating product. The distillery is near the end of the harbor-side developments.

Adventures on Water

Any number of boat trips are available from the Mahón harbor, some as short as 30 minutes, others a day or longer. Scout the options along the harbor to find the price, length and craft suitable. The latter could be a cocktail-conducive catamaran, a kid-thrilling glass-bottom boat, or a sunny deck boat.

■ Ciudadela

The former capital until the British came along in the 18th century, Ciudadela is the jewel of Menorca. While it has a buttoned-up appearance to it, there is no mistaking its beauty. Ciudadela was ransacked and almost leveled along with the rest of the island by Redbeard's Turks in the mid-16th century. The look of Ciudadela today comes from the 17th and 18th century, when the city gradually rebuilt itself. Notable are the many palatial homes and its Catedral, with traces of the former mosque still apparent.

■ Fornells

On a clear bay among the evergreens and olive trees of the island's north coast, the white village of Fornells is small even by Menorca standards. Some 300 people make it their home throughout the year, most related in some way or another to the fishing industry (there are almost as many boats as there are people). Lobster, or *llagosta* in Catalan, is synonymous with Fornells. When summertime ratchets up the village's numbers to a whopping 2,000 people, you can be sure that most have come to enjoy the local delicacy, *calderetes de llagosta*, a dish of boiled lobster simmered in a fresh garlic, onion and tomato sauce, then finished off with a few drops of cognac and served with toast. The best place to enjoy the dish is at one of the restaurants on the Paseo Marítimo promenade and the town square overlooking the bay.

■ Talatí de Dalt

The stone monuments – some 1,600 of them left by the prehistoric Talayotic – are a common sight in the Menorca countryside. Of these, the well-preserved Talatí de Dalt has been the most extensively studied by archeologists seeking clues to these mysterious structures, which, some believe, were associated with sacrificial or funerary rituals. Others believe that the T-shaped *taula* megaliths and their components were simply parts of a larger structure, perhaps of living quarters. The other two commonly found structures are *navetas*, dome-shaped stone buildings that were most likely living quarters, and *talaiots*, cone-shaped structures possibly used as funeral chambers. The Talayotic culture, a small band of farmers and shepherds, arrived on the island over 4,000 years ago. Talatí de Dalt and most of the other surviving structures, though, date to around 2000 BC. During their most prosperous period, from the fourth to second centuries BC, when they benefited from the growing Mediterranean sea trade, the Talayotic population numbered, at most, 200 people. With the arrival of the Romans, they were gradually subjugated, though some apparently continued to live in the caves that form part of the Talatí de Dalt site, and in other pockets around the island, until the beginning of the Middle Ages. Before heading out of Mahón, which is a 10-minute drive east of the site, stop in at the tourist office to pick up a map of this and the other prehistoric monuments on the island.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

In Mahón, the ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel El Port Mahón** *(Avda Fort de l'Eau 13, ☎ 97 136 26 00, d 155€)* is typical of the 18th-century British colonial architecture. Its accommodations are backed by a terrific view of the bay. **Hostal Fornells** *(C/ Mayor 17, ☎ 97 137 66 76)*, overlooking the bay of Fornells, offers clean private rooms with bath, air conditioning, telephone and television. The views of the bay from its shared balcony are a treat. In Fornells, **Es Pla** *(Pasaje des Pla, ☎ 971 37 66 55)* is one of the local restaurant kings of the *calderata* (the island's traditional lobster dish). The place's reputation precedes it, making it one of the busier restaurants along the bay.

■ Northern Beaches & Resorts

East of Fornells, the large, white sands of **Son Parc** attract a number of tourists during the high season. The neighboring beaches of **Cala Tirant** are similar, high-volume with lots of options for eating, entertainment and watersports. Less-frequented and mostly undeveloped beaches in the north include **Cala Pregonda**, with its strange rock formations, and **Agaiarens**, notable for its dunes and pristine surroundings. Both are west of Fornells.

■ Southern Beaches & Resort Areas

To the north of Mahón the **Cala Mesquida** is a sandy cove frequented mostly by locals. At the opposite end of the island nearer to Ciutadella, the **Cala Macarelleta** is recognized as one of the island's best beaches. This small cove is sided by pinewoods and the adjoining, larger cove known as Cala

Macarella. Another jewel is **Son Saura**, a 10-minute walk off the road south of Ciutadella, but well worth it. This isolated beach surrounds a calm, clear bay. Plenty of other beaches are scattered around the coast south of Ferreries. Of these, the sheltered **Cala Mitjana** off the road south to the **Cala Galdana** is paramount. The latter is a popular destination as well, with plenty of hotels, restaurants and bars. Heading east along the southern coast, the **Cala'n Porter** is a well-known beach and resort area and, farther along, **Son Bou** is the island's longest beach, with a cool complex of beachfront *chiringuitos* in which to enjoy a drink.

Ibiza

For seven months out of the year the island of Ibiza hibernates. If, for some reason, you want to see and experience the island as it must have been back in the late 1960s, just as the European hippies were beginning to arrive and the artist communes to thrive around Ibiza Town, this seven-month period from October to April, however, is the only window onto the past.

Today, for five months each year, Ibiza is the undisputed king of Europe's party scene, wilder on a slow night than Mardí Gras at its wildest, as unrelenting and extravagant as Rio's Carnival festival, but for months on end rather than just days. Ibiza is nothing like it was just 15 years ago, before the world's best DJ's had begun to spin here in the late 1980s, before the word began to leak beyond the islands, before people started flamboyantly dressing up only to get dressed down sometime in the night, before MTV and E! brought the attention of Ibiza to young Americans, who then began to join the young Europeans waiting outside discos with a heavy wallet and a light head.

But is there something else other than partying? The answer is an emphatic yes. Yes, there are serene villages like **Sana Eulària des Riu**. There is the secluded beach cove of **Xarraca** and a number of others like it. And there are the mature English and German crowds who call **Sant Antoni de Portmany** simply San Antonio. This is Ibiza's other large city and the polar-opposite of Ibiza Town just a 20-minute drive east. But nobody seems to care about all that, at least for the five-month period when the island spins its wheels.

The popularity of Ibiza among Gen-X travelers who know no limits to the price of pleasure has driven prices for necessities like accommodations and food sky-high throughout the island. If someone wants peace, serenity and traditional culture they'd be wiser to seek it on one of the other islands or on the mainland and save their money.

■ Tourist Information

In Ibiza Town, the tourism office *(Vara de Rey 13, ☎ 971301900)* is located in an area with a number of accommodations, shops and restaurants. Plenty of English-language publications with up-to-date info on the party scene, restaurants and culture are on hand for the taking. One of the better publications, as far as disco junkies are concerned, is *DJ Ibiza*. Across the island, the tourism office in San Antonio *(☎ 97 134 33 63)* is on the Paseo de Ses Fonts.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: Ibiza's airport *(☎ 97 180 90 00)* is a five-minute drive outside Ibiza Town in the direction of San José. It handles both Spanish and international flights.

By Sea: Ibiza is well-connected by **ferries** to the other islands and the mainland. Still, with four companies running ferries, seats can be difficult to get during the high-season. As with each of the islands, plan in advance during this season.

The following are routes for each of the ferries from Ibiza Town. Check their websites or call ahead for days and times. **Balearia** runs to San Antonia, Palma, Denia, Valencia and Barcelona *(☎ 90 216 01 80, www.balearia.es)*. **Iscomar** runs to Palma and Denia *(☎ 90 211 91 28, www.iscomar.com)*. **Umafisa** runs to and from Barcelona via Palma *(☎ 97 131 02 01, www.umafisa.com)*. **Trasmediterranea** runs to Barcelona, Valencia and Palma *(☎ 90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)*.

By Bus: Ibizabus handles public transportation on the island. The main villages are well-connected and in Ibiza Town getting around is relatively easy. For late-night revelers the company runs a nightbus from June-Sept. between Ibiza, Playa den Bossa, Cap Martinet, Santa Eulalia, San Antonio and Port des Torrent.

By Car: Rental car companies (see page 66) have agencies in Ibiza's airport. A local company, **Moto Luis** *(Avda Portmany 5, ☎ 97 134 05 21, www.motoluis.com)*, rents economy cars for as little as 35€ per day.

■ Ibiza Town (Eivissa)

It is hard to leave Ibiza Town, the Balearic Islands' most free-spirited, fun-loving destination. **D'Alt Vila**, the inspiring medieval neighborhood of Ibiza Town, rides high up a promontory overlooking the bay. Cobble streets are steep and worn smooth through the ages; views over the bay are stunning from any one of the numerous perches looking out over the battlement walls.

Ibiza Town, with Citadel above it

Entrance from the newer, lower part of town around the port is via the **Portal Nou** or through the **Portal de Tablas**, a far steeper ascent but well worth it to pass through its ancient draw bridge. The latter portal leads into the central **Plaza de Vila** adjoining the **Catedral de las Nieves**. Also within the walls of the medieval neighborhood is the **Archaeological Museum of Ibiza** *(Plaza de la Catedral 3, ☎ 97 130 12 31, open Tues.-Sun. 10 am-2 pm and 6-8 pm)*, with a collection of the island's relics dating to the Phoenician times. **Museum of Contemporary Art** *(Ronda de Narcis Puget, ☎ 97 130 27 23)* showcases local island artists from the 1960s to the present.

Down around the water, **Sa Penya** is the action district of Ibiza Town, lined with shops, stands, restaurants and plenty more to do nestling right up to the base of D'Alt Vila. The **Paseo Vara de Rey** is the central grooving grounds of Sa Penya. Around it, the streets of **Calle de La Virgén** and **Calle de Pou** are known for their lively exuberance as the sun sets. Sa Penya ends at the waters of the bay, where a pedestrian promenade is a good place for gawking at the houses so often captured in Ibiza Town postcards.

■ Ibiza's Hippy Markets

The hippies that started filtering into Ibiza in the 1960s to live around its undeveloped beaches haven't all been displaced on the island (their presence is somewhat outmoded by the upscale partiers and DJs who now own Ibiza's reputation). From May-Oct., **Es Caná**, near the resort of Santa Eulalia is the site of one of the island's two hippy markets. Compared to Spain's more traditional markets, these are something out of a Tom Wolfe novel: incense fills the air, drums are pounded on, and baby barefoot hippies run around while their parents sell some pretty cool wares. Stuff you'll see is blown glass, handmade clothing, jewelry and leather goods. A smaller market is held in **Las Dalias** near San Carlos every Saturday. Let's not talk about the stuff you'll smell.

■ San Antonio's Sunset Bars

Maybe you've heard or had one of the Chillout CDs that come out of Ibiza Along the promenade of San Antonio's Bay of Calo des Moro, the **Café del Mar** and, more recently, the **Café Savannah** and **Coastline Café**, have been the inspiration for the growing popularity of ambient house music.

Since the 1980s, tourists and locals have been piling in to these cafés just before sunset to watch the colors splay out over the bay while DJs spin soothing melodies, rhythmic house compilations. CDs of this stuff were long circulated in the turntable crowds, but recently they've materialized on music store shelves throughout Europe and the US. You can buy the music at these cafés (where a vodka *limón* is always a good drink to try), or once back in the streets of Barcelona and Madrid pick up a burned copy from the street vendors for 2€.

■ Beaches

Around Ibiza Town, the **Playa d'en Bossa** extending south from Ibiza town is the island's longest and loudest. Besides the *chiringuito* beach bars and restaurants running the length of it, you'll be able to find plenty of entertainment, from merely gawking at the beautiful people to windsailing or a quick pick-up game of soccer.

Pine trees surround Ibiza's southernmost beach, **Las Salinas**, where clothes are about as useful as a space heater. Las Salinas has a reputation for being more exclusive than rowdy Playa d'en Bossa, and the prices of the surrounding establishments tend to reflect this. With just a smattering of posh apartment homes, the **Cala Jondal** is the antithesis of many a Spanish coast lined with tall, mood-reducing hotel complexes. The waters are crystal-clear and the sand as fine as what you would find in an hourglass.

The town of San Antonio has a fine manmade beach on its doorstep. A series of smaller beaches wraps around San Antonio's bay, though these become just as crowded as the central beach. Other nearby natural beaches worth a

visit include the small, undeveloped **Cala d'Hort**, outside San José; **Cala Moli**, an isolated curve of sand surrounded by wooded hills; **Cala Conta**, for its stunningly clear waters. In the north near Portinatx, the **Cala Xarraca** is a cherished spot, with two small, sheltered beaches lining a rocky, picturesque bay of clear, blue water.

Besides Santa Eulalia's manmade beach, the small **Niu Blau** beach in the direction of Es Cana is less crowded and developed. **Cala Martina** doesn't have the presumptuous air of some of the other nearby beaches with their resorts, but it is still a happening place with plenty of *chiringuito* bars and, on occasion, a hippy or two playing the flute or eating fire for coins.

CLUB MUSIC

For most, the one striking feature of club music is its synthesized, electronic vibe. These days club music is mostly created before the dancing starts, often using digital loops and layered tracks.

Most agree that club music evolved from the American funk music of the 1960s, around the time Ibiza was becoming a popular destination for hippies and the musically inclined. There, the so-called Balearic house music gradually evolved at the hands of once fledgling DJs as an offshoot of the house music that had recently developed in New York. Partiers began to filter into the new Ibiza clubs that were springing up in response to this music and soon pockets of clubbers around the world were dancing to, or altering, these early styles. As club music evolved and splintered into its myriad styles, it began to transcend the confines of the late-night clubs that had encouraged it. It filtered into settings from the sunrise beach bars of Ibiza to the Woodstock-like festivals of Glastonbury to everyday watering holes in Spain and elsewhere.

■ Discos

From May to Sept., midnight until sun-up, Ibiza's discos suck in the travelers like a horsefly to a bug zapper. Before the night really gets on with itself, you'll run into hawkers throughout the old part of town trying to entice you to buy a drink or two in exchange for discounted or free tickets to the discos later. Don't be shy, it's worth saving a few bucks to spend them on drinks, I suppose. But don't forget to drink lots of water before heading to the discos because the price of water inside discos is one of Europe's greatest travesties. You can try to sneak small bottles in, but these days entranceway searches are becoming frequent; another option, and which you'll see plenty of, is to simply fork over the 5-7€ for a bottle of water, then refill it at a faucet throughout the night. Expect to pay anywhere from 20-75€ to get into the discos without a pass or discount card. Keep an eye out for these discount cards, which are typically adorned with psychedelic images and handed out throughout the day by kids working to earn a few bucks from the clubs

One of the bars worth checking out is **Bora Bora**, located next to some of the island's best discos along the Playa d'en Bossa just south of Ibiza Town. The place never closes and usually a hyped DJ is spinning, though keeping the

tone comparatively chill. Across the street is the **Space Disco**, famous and beloved because it opens after-hours (around 7 am) just as the other discos are closing down for the day. It's next to the water park of Playa d'en Bossa and has two distinct scenes: inside, they play trance crap (a heavy, somber, almost dirge-like turntable music); outside on the terrace, the scene is less angst-ridden and more upbeat with snappier house music.

Everyone in Europe knows about the Pacha discos, because they're everywhere now (Barcelona has two). But Ibiza's **Pasha** *(Paseo Maritimo)* across from the marina was the first of the Pacha discos and, for that matter, of the Ibiza Town discos. It set off a revolution when it first opened in the early '70s and things haven't been normal since. Inside, Pacha is huge but made to seem smaller as much of its floor space is divided into smaller side-rooms, some with themes, some playing funk or world beat rather than the predominant house music. It is one of the only Ibiza Town discos to stay open year-round .

Outside of Ibiza Town two old-school options are still kickin' it. **Privilege**, one of Ibiza's first and still the world's biggest club, with a capacity for 10,000 people, a swimming pool, gardens and plenty of dance floors. Its Manumission is the weirdest and wildest spectacle to be found in Ibiza on Monday nights. Privilege is located off the road between Ibiza and San Antonio on a hill overlooking San Rafael, a 15-minute cab ride from Ibiza Town. Expect to pay as little as 30€ for admission and as much as 65€ on a Monday night.

Not far from Privilege off the same road between San Antonio and Ibiza Town, **Amnesia** is another of the 1970s survivors and credited as the island's first open-air disco (though new regulations have mandated the installation of roofs). Its foam parties are well known.

■ Where to Stay

Accommodation prices and availability vary widely depending on the seasons. For summer travel, plan to make reservations well in advance (or sleep on the beach) and pay almost twice the low-season price.

In Ibiza Town, the ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Royal Plaza** *(C/ Pedro Frances 27, ☎ 97 131 00 00, fax 97 131 40 95, d 100-200€)*, a few blocks from both the port and the Paseo Vara de Rey is posh and pricey. Its distance from the major disco scene ensures that the place is far quieter than its competition closer in. Few amenities have been spared. The rooms have broadband Internet, private balconies and swank, contemporary décor; the hotel has a health spa, a restaurant and bar and laundering services. At the other end of the price spectrum, **Hostel La Marina** *(C/ Barcelona 7, ☎ 97 131 01 72, s 40-60€)* is hip, colorful and as stylish as most budget accommodations get; each room is different, some with private bath, some with bunkbeds, many with views onto the bay. An ideal location, with two other hostels next door under the same management.

A less scintillating option is **Hostel Vara del Rey** *(Paseo Vara de Rey 7, ☎ 97130 13 76, s 25-40€)*, with small, bland rooms, shared baths, but a great location overlooking the town square two blocks off the port.

In San Antonio, the **Hostal Residencia Mitjorn** *(C/ Metge Mateu Gasull 2, ☎ 97 134 09 02; d 40-75€)* is a few blocks from the port in the center of town.

It has small but well-appointed rooms with private bath, as well as an outdoor pool and terrace bar.

Outside Santa Eulària des Riu, the lovely **Hostal Buenavista** *(C/ San Jaime, Ctra de la Iglesia, ☎ 97 133 00 03, d 70-80€)* offers views of the bay and rooms surrounded by lush, manicured gardens. The outdoor restaurant, bar, pool and terrace are shaded by palm trees, giving the place a distinct tropical ambiance.

■ What to Eat & Where

The classic place to dine in Ibiza Town is **Ca N'Alfredo** *(Passeig Vera del Rey 16, ☎ 97 131 12 74)*, serving traditional island cuisine since the 1930s. Plan to make a reservation at night, as the prices are too good to pass up and the location even better. Expect to pay around 15€ per person, though it can be done for less. At the opposite end of the spectrum, **Jack-Pot** *(Passeig Joan Carles I, ☎ 97 131 33 12)* is beloved by young partiers who get the munchies around 2 am. The place serves typical tourist food: salads, *bocadillos*, some rice dishes and a lot of international fare. But it's only open when it's dark.

Canary Islands

Introduction

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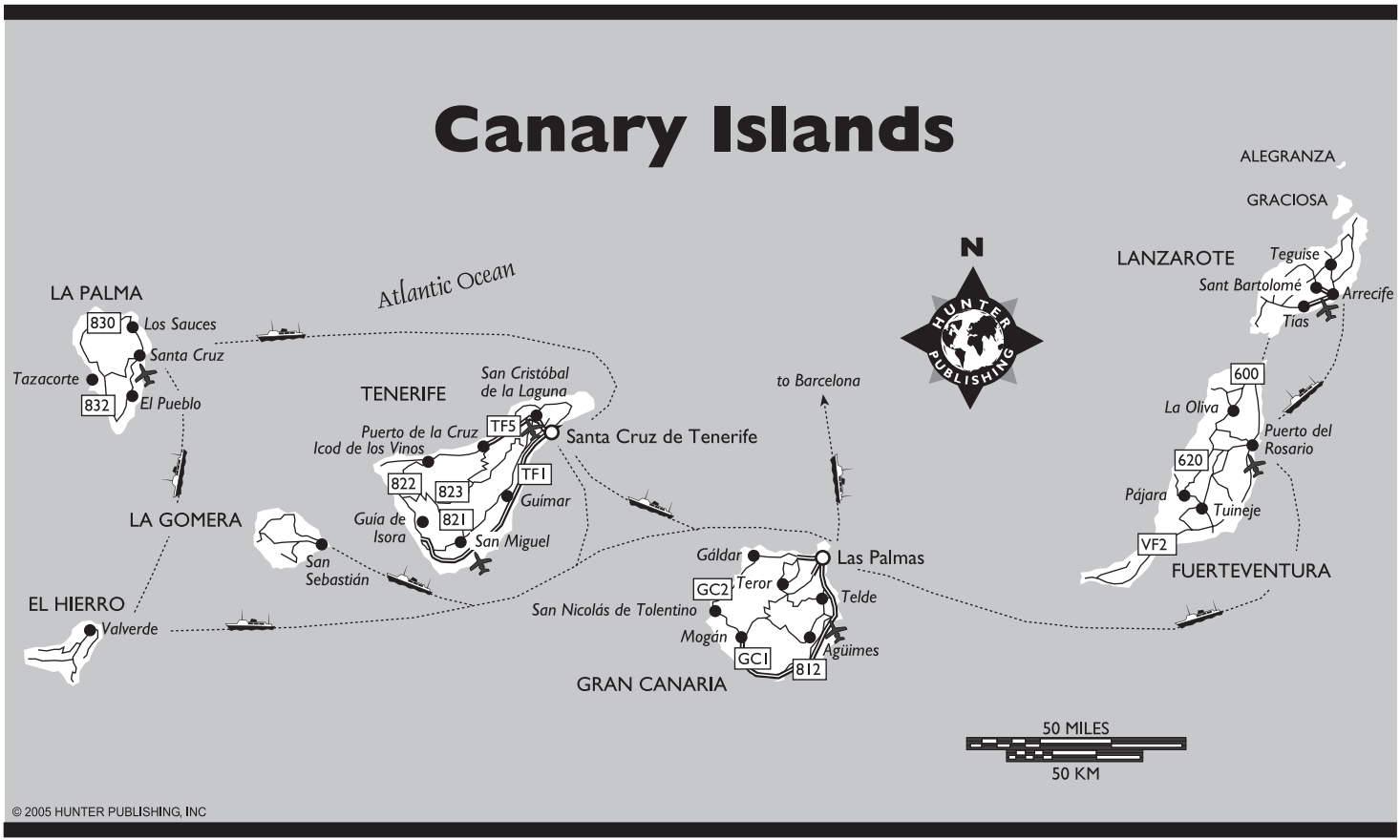
With peninsular Spain over 1,500 watery km (930 miles) to the north, a look and feel quite distinct from the motherland becomes quickly apparent once you're standing on the *tierra firma* of the Canary Islands. The steady, year-round spring temperatures – which can come as a godsend while the rest of Spain endures its tempestuous swelters and freezes with no happy medium in sight – make exploring the wilder spaces as comfortable as a snooze on one of the hundreds of beaches. If natural, the beaches will be volcano dark and hot to the soles of sensitive feet or, if man-made, cool with Saharan sand like that of Tenerife's crowded Playa de las Americas. The many landscapes of the islands are a mix of rare and otherworldly scenery in settings that range from lush volcanic highlands to arid, semi-desert flats.

Though scientists have put forth a plausible explanation concerning the origin of these islands, ancient myths linger on and add a certain element of intrigue to the Canaries. Ancient Greek poets and philosophers associated them with the mythical Elysian Fields, the Garden of the Hesperides, and the lost continent of Atlantis – fantastical, Edenesque realms somewhere beyond the Pillars of Hercules (now recognized as the Strait of Gibraltar on Spain's southern coast). Since at least Roman times the Canaries have been referred to as the "Fortunate Islands," owing to their terrific climate, which averages 22°C (72°F) annually. The moniker endures along with the myths, and no doubt the traveler seeking an idyllic island respite will appreciate such an incomparable setting.

Most likely, the seven islands were created through two separate geological events. Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, the easternmost and oldest of the archipelago, share characteristics with the nearby African continent – arid conditions, a hot Sirocco wind that blows in from the Sahara for weeks on end and a lower average elevation. That low elevation is incapable of catching the moisture-laden clouds that hang up on the mountains of the other five islands, whose northern faces are carpeted by lush vegetation and blessed with conditions far more favorable to agriculture (notably the ubiquitous Canary bananas). It would appear that plate tectonics caused Lanzarote and Fuerteventura to split at some time in the distant past and, through the ages, drift farther and farther out to sea. The westernmost islands of Tenerife, Gran Canaria, La Palma, Hierro and Gomera, in contrast, were gradually thrust above sea level through volcanic eruptions over the past 20 million years. Though none of the numerous Canary volcanoes are currently active, many remain dormant. The most recent eruption occurred in 1971 on La Palma, and before that in 1909 when Teide last erupted. Their devastating potential intact, these island landscapes will continue to evolve, to build up as erosion breaks them down and plate tectonics moves them steadily across the Atlantic at a rate of one cm or .39 inch per year.


Canary Islands
ALEGRANZA
GRACIOSA
LANZAROTE
Teguise
Sant Bartolomé
Arrecife
Tias
600
La Oliva
Puerto del Rosario
620
Pájara
Tuineje
VF2
FUERTEVENTURA
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HUNTER PUBLISHING
Atlantic Ocean
LA PALMA
830
Los Sauces
Santa Cruz
Tazacorte
832
El Pueblo
LA GOMERA
EL HIERRO
Valverde
TENERIFE
San Cristóbal de la Laguna
Puerto de la Cruz
Icod de los Vinos
TF5
Santa Cruz de Tenerife
TF1
822
823
821
Guímar
Guía de Isora
San Miguel
San Sebastián
to Barcelona
Gáldar
Las Palmas
GC2
Teror
Telde
San Nicolás de Tolentino
Mogán
Agüimes
GC1
812
GRAN CANARIA
50 MILES
50 KM
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■ History

After almost a century steadily expanding their reign over the islands, the Spaniards completed the conquest of the Canaries in 1496, a few years after Christopher Columbus had made his fated layover on the island of Gomera. From there, he set sail in search of a westward passage to Asia, which, a month later, led to the discovery of the West Indies. Long before this time, though, the Canaries had been utilized as an Atlantic crossroads due to their convenient proximity to Europe and Africa. With Columbus' exploits and the realization that these islands were not, in fact, the end of the world, the Canaries' ideal situation as a way-station on newly expanding exploration routes soon drew ships waving other European flags. The influence of not only the Spaniards but the neighboring Portuguese and sizable representatives from most other Western European countries came to influence the culture of the islands; it also led to the subjugation and ultimately hastened the disappearance of a mysterious native culture that, like the native flora and fauna, had prospered undisturbed on the island since ancient times.

The newly arriving explorers described these *Gaunches*, as they came to be known, as a race never previously encountered, in appearance tall and fair like northern Europeans, but possessing a unique culture in which cave dwellings, nature worship and complex mummification techniques were the norm. While their origins remain a mystery, ethnologists wager that the native islanders were of African descent, having arrived some time during the first millennium before Christ. The Gaunches would not survive the influx of foreigners, but their rudimentary dwellings are still seen in certain areas of the islands, namely on the northeastern peninsula of Tenerife.

As the years of exploration and New World plundering waned during the 18th and 19th centuries, a new breed of explorers began to arrive on the islands, drawn not by the search for riches on the far side of the Atlantic, but by the allure of the archipelago's natural wealth which, in its pristine and isolated nature, has been said to rival that of the Galapagos Islands. The significance of the Canaries' unique subtropical Atlantic position, coupled with its favorable weather conditions, cannot be understated; the one shielded it from the ecological devastation wrought by expanding icecaps to the north in Europe and expanding desertification to the east in North Africa, while the other both promoted and sustained rare flora and fauna like the evergreen laurel forests that had become extinct on the neighboring continents due to the titanic climatic changes they experienced. Naturalists found in the Canary Islands a botanical paradise, a haven for over 600 native species, including the mythical dragon tree, a variety of endemic birds and one species of giant lizard capable of growing up to six feet long. Today, with four of Spain's 12 national parks on the islands accounting for some 35% of their total land mass, sustaining this wondrous natural environment is a reasonable ambition despite the steady growth of tourism.

■ The Canaries Today

Somewhere around eight million tourists visit the islands each year, though their distribution is decidedly lopsided; the most populous island of Gran Canaria and the largest island of Tenerife, both with the tourism infrastructure and the widest variety of micro-climates, receive the brunt of the annual

holiday traffic. Islands like Gomera, which is the only one still lacking an airport (though this is about to change), or Lanzarote, with its sparse volcanic landscape devoid of all but the hardiest greenery, receive far fewer visitors throughout the year and, in many cases, remain empty, save for the local populations strewn around miles of empty, sandy beaches.

■ What to See & Do

In most cases travelers begin their trip here on one of the two most popular islands and, if they want, use the ferry boats to reach the smaller islands for short day-excursions. While Gran Canaria and Tenerife offer the widest array of tourist entertainment and accommodations, each has beautiful and largely unspoiled natural areas just a short drive from the developed centers of activity. Scuba diving is popular in places around the islands, as is surfing and windsurfing. And each offers an extensive and varied network of hiking paths which are most frequented and best maintained within and around the four national parks.

> **TIP:** If you want to island-hop in order to explore as much of the Canaries as possible you should plan well in advance, as the ferry system linking the islands is not very flexible and, particularly on the less populated islands, public transportation can be unreliable.

■ Getting to the Islands

By Air: For the majority of the year daily flights are available from the Iberian Peninsula to the airports of Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. Most major Western European destinations are linked daily by flights to Gran Canaria and Tenerife, in many cases offered at ridiculously cheap rates that include hotel with breakfast as well as transportation to and from the airport. Any travel agency in Spain will have colorful signs taped to their front windows advertising the latest cheap airfares to the islands.

By Sea: The most frequent and reliable ferry service to the islands from Spain is by **Transmediterranea** *(☎ 90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)*, which maintains an English-language website with current schedules and seat availability. Expect to spend around a day on the water (though the trip is generally enjoyable, often with dolphin escorts; a bar, cafeteria and observation deck are also standard). The ferries run from Cádiz twice weekly to Gran Canaria, Tenerife and La Palma; multiple weekly ferries return to Cádiz from Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Lanzarote and La Palma. Other ferry operators connect the islands and, in certain cases, run to the Spanish mainland and Morocco. These are mentioned below and within each applicable island section.

■ Hopping the Islands

By Air: Binter Airlines *(☎ 92 844 01 00 in Gran Canaria, ☎ 92 223 43 46 in Tenerife)* operates daily flights from Gran Canaria and Tenerife to each of the islands except Gomera, which has no airport.

By Sea: Transmediterranea operates the following regular ferry services between the islands:

- From Gran Canaria to Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, La Palma and Tenerife
- From Tenerife to Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro
- From Feurteventura to Gran Canaria and Tenerife
- From La Gomera to Tenerife and El Hierro
- From La Palma to Gran Canaria and Tenerife
- From El Hierro to Tenerife and La Gomera

Please note that the islands of Tenerife and Fuerteventura have two ports used by Transmediterranea, each of which services particular island destinations. Transmediterranea also operates a faster jet-foil service, though on a less reliable basis and at higher fares. The Norwegian-run **Fred Olsen S.A. ferries** *(☎ 92 262 82 32, www.reservas.fredolsen.es)* run between Tenerife and La Gomera, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, Gran Canaria and Tenerife, La Palma and Tenerife and El Hierro and Tenerife. **Naviera Armas**, another ferry company, serves the larger islands, excepting La Gomera and El Hierro *(☎ 902 456 500, www.navieraarmas.com)*.

■ Traditional Island Festivals

Tenerife's **Carnaval** celebrations in February are undeniably the largest, wildest and most spectacular of all the Canary festivals combined. For a more in-depth look at what Carnaval entails, see page 618. In honoring **Corpus Christi** on the ninth week following Easter, the Tenerife villages of La Oratava and La Laguna vie for celebratory supremacy each year with their ornate floral tapestries inlaid in ash over the processional route, which ensures that the tapestries will be obliterated once the feet have passed and permeated the air with freshly crushed petals.

During the first week of July Lanzarote parties in honor of its patron saint **San Marcial** and then again in late August it honors **San Ginés**, the patron saint of Arrecife, with an even longer celebration held in a large fair ground and capped off by plenty of fireworks.

Gran Canaria celebrates its patron saint during the **Fiesta de Nuestra Señora del Carmen** during the middle of July with street revelry and a traditional boat trip for the Christian deity around the bay. For a more pagan event, try the **Bajada de la Rama** (descent of the branch) on August 4 in the Gran Canaria village of Agaete, a ceremonial holdover from the original island inhabitants, the Gaunches.

Other festivals that only come around every half-decade or so include the **Bajada de la Virgen de las Nieves** (August 5) in La Palma, during which the main attractions are the "dwarves" dancing in honor of this, the patron saint of the island. The islanders of El Hierro celebrate their patron saint every four years on September 24 during the **Fiesta of Nuestra Señora de los Reyes**.

■ Gastronomy

In addition to fresh seafood, traditional Canary Island recipes utilize the native pork, rabbit and goat (the latter often ends up in a stew known as the *salmorejo*), a variety of tropical fruit that mostly comes from the island of La Palma, and many, many pota-

toes. This last ingredient is the basis for the ubiquitous *papas Arrugadas*, a simple dish of new potatoes first boiled in seawater then baked and served with one of two common Canary sauces. The *mojo rojo*, the spicier of the two sauces, is a blend of paprika, chilies and cumin, while the sharper *mojo verde* incorporates fresh coriander leaves. Heavy soups made of watercress or squash are commonly served as a first course. And don't overlook the Canary wines, which have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity. Try the volcanic wines of Lanzarote's La Geria region, and finish the meal off with *miel de Palma*, a typical Canary dessert.

La Isla de Tenerife

The overwhelming popularity of Tenerife among European travelers is due to a number of factors. Geographically, it is situated roughly at the center of the archipelago, facilitating ferry travel to each of the surrounding islands. Though it is the largest in total area – around 100 km long and 40 km across at its widest point (62 x 24 miles) – touring the whole of Tenerife, at least by way of the well-maintained *autovías* along its perimeter, can be managed in a matter of hours. This, mated to an efficient public bus system, countless low-cost car rental agencies and innumerable resort complexes and eateries (particularly in the two largest cities) bring that goal of a "carefree" vacation a little closer to reality.

It has taken two very different kinds of phenomena – the one a product of nature, the other a celebration of mankind – to forge Tenerife's reputation. Where the thick forests and the oddly intriguing red and grey natural curves, striated pillars and crevasses of the Parque Nacional de Cañadas del Teide evoke a spirit of reverence, the famed, overly joyous Carnaval festivities in February promote a tireless spirit of revelry on the island. Mt. Teide, a dormant volcano at the center of the national park that covers most of the central, western area of the island, is Spain's highest peak and part of what is undeniably one of the country's loveliest landscapes.

Along the coast north and east of the park – a stretch where a greater sense of the native island culture can still be had – trade winds haul in rain clouds that regularly buffet the area, creating lush, verdant landscapes that contrast with the arid, but much sunnier, conditions of the southern coast. The south is an area typically preferred by package tourists since it has the largest clustering of all-inclusive, eat-and-do-what-everybody-else-does resorts and many long, manmade beaches like Playa de las Americas.

From the west, the island gradually tapers to form a peninsula that, because of its distance from Teide, was largely unaffected by the volcano's past eruptions. Culminating at the Punta de Anaga in the east, this is an area of vibrant green, heavily wooded ravines surrounding the Mercedes Mountains, where traces of the original Gaunches' culture survive in the form of caves and crude pyramids near the historical capital city of La Laguna, a preferable tourist destination to the modern-day capital city of Santa Cruz.

■ Tourism Information

A small tourist information booth is in the **Reina Sofia airport** in front of the arrivals gate *(☎ 92 239 20 37)*. The other main tourism offices are in **Santa Cruz de Tenerife** *(Plaza de España, s/n, ☎ 92 223 95 92)* and **Puerto de la Cruz** *(Plaza de Europa, s/n, ☎ 92 238 60 00)*.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: Located on the southern rim of the island, the **Reina Sofia Airport** *(Granadilla de Abona, ☎ 92 275 92 00)* accommodates the majority of sun-seeking travelers. The smaller **Los Rodeos Airport** *(La Laguna, ☎ 92 263 56 35)* is in the more scenic north of the island. Frequent visitors to the islands – wishing to avoid the crush of package tourists arriving at Reina Sofia – seem to prefer Rodeos, despite the few minor inconveniences it creates as an old airport (flights in and out are less frequent and often pricier).

By Bus: The company **Titsa** *(☎ 92 253 13 00)* operates a regular public bus service throughout the island. In Canary Island speak, buses are called *guaguas*. Timetables are available at stations and stops; tickets can be purchased on the bus and are relatively cheap. Reliability is generally good, though a rental car allows much more freedom for just a little more money.

By Car: Renting a car in Tenerife is as cheap as anywhere in Spain (as low as 20€ per day, including mileage and insurance). Most package tour operators make these arrangements for you. Otherwise, book in advance over the Internet or by phone. On our last trip to Tenerife we found that most of the big resort hotels have rental agency tables set up in their lobby. While easy to find in the off-season with no reservation, during the high season cars can be more difficult to come by and you'll pay a premium without prior arrangements.

■ Adventures on Water

The hardiest winds blow in off the village of **El Médano** on the southern coast, where a hip windsurfing culture has developed as a result. Along with Tárifa on mainland Spain's southern coast, Tenerife is recognized as one of the country's best destinations for this sport. Surfing, while excellent at times, usually takes a backseat. Of its two frequented bays, the northernmost is the site of a regular World Cup championship because of the variety of its conditions and the potential challenges they create. While more open and forgiving, the southern bay seems to attract inexperienced tourists, and thus is avoided by serious windsurfers (who also avoid a lot of boogie boarder clutter). A number of surf shops rent sails on each of the bays, among them the widely known **Fun Factory** *(Hotel Calimera Atlantic Playa, Avda. Europa 2, ☎ 922 716 273, www.fanatic.el-medano)*. The shop offers courses, rentals and maintains a good website with links to current weather conditions. Expect to pay over 100€ for a one-week sail rental.

Other windsurfing areas in Tenerife include the **Bajamar** and **Punta del Hidalgo** outside of La Laguna in the northeast of the island, by far the most dangerous, but potentially most rewarding spot for experienced windsurfers and surfers. In colder weather, the swells off of **Playa de Las Americas** can be as large as anywhere else on the island (expect to see only experienced surfers at this time). In summer the waves can still be fun, but it becomes terribly crowded. Near Puerto de la Cruz on the northern coast, surfers prefer the **Playa de Martiánez**.

■ Adventures on Foot

A popular hiking area, the **Mt. Teide National Park** harbors a number of trails that can be explored independently or with guided tours organized by the local park office. Maps can be surprisingly difficult to find, though the main office in Santa Cruz usually keeps some on hand. If you wish to embark on the ultimate hike here, the summit of the **Pico del Teide**, you'll need to acquire a permit for the last stint between the top cable car station and the peak. Get it from the visitor center in Santa Cruz before setting off. Most hikers choose to begin at the base of **Montaña Blanca**, where a trail to the peak is signposted beside the road. Before reaching the peak of Montaña Blanca, veer off on the trail leading to the mountain **Refugio de Altavista** (3,270 m/10,725 feet), which is a few hours farther along. Reservations for a one-night stay only must be made in advance. From the *refugio*, the trail becomes steeper through a series of switchbacks before reaching La Rambleta and the top cable car station. After presenting the permit, you'll be allowed to walk the final 250 m (820 feet) to the rim of the crater via the Telesforo Bravo, which is the steepest and shiftiest stretch of the hike, and can be the most crowded. Once at the top, if the clouds are not too heavy, you'll be able to see the whole of Tenerife and the surrounding islands. No doubt you'll also smell the nasty, sulfuric breath of the crater emitted in slumbering gasps and sighs... until the next eruption, whenever that may be.

Expect the hike to take upwards of seven hours; wear sturdy hiking boots (much of the path is jagged rock and lose stones), and carry plenty of water. Because of snow and ice, attempting this hike in winter is discouraged, but it's possible with basic climbing gear, particularly crampons. Serious hikers may want to continue on to the less-crowded **Pico Viejo** (3,135 m/10,283 feet), the nearest peak that is visible from Teide and connected by a ridge trail that takes a number of hours to complete. Unless you have set off early in the morning, doing both in one day is fairly difficult.

■ Carnaval

Only Río de Janeiro draws more praise for its carnaval festivities than the island of Tenerife, which has modeled much of its celebration after Brazil's and, in many instances, has come to rival the latter in its outrageous displays of revelry. Beginning the week before Ash Wednesday, the frenzied spirit escalates as the flamboyant, elaborately festooned Queen of Carnaval is elected from among a number of beautiful, fawning participants by a panel of judges. Along with her four ladies in waiting, the Queen will preside over the rest of the Carnaval festivities, which officially begin with Friday's inauguration parade through the Avenidad de Belgica and Plaza de España. For the next week, out-of-towner and local *Santacrucero* revelers numbering in the hundreds of thousands, each disguised in a costume related to the year's theme, will be seduced by the roving, parodic skits performed by the *agrupaciones* groups, the *rondallas* choral ensembles, the *fregolinos*, or amateurs of the *bel canto*, and countless other drunken, boisterous groups.

By Saturday, the *camparsas* have begun imitating the Latin dances of Brazil on the Avenida de Anaga. Along with the other groups, salsa bands everywhere incite the masses to dance, well into Sunday evening until Monday co-

mes around to offer some rest and reprieve from the celebrations. Then it's Tuesday, day of the Grand Parade that incorporates every group, beginning at 4 pm in the grand spectacle known as the Triumph of Carnival.

Ash Wednesday officially signals the beginning of Lent and the end of Carnaval, or so it would seem, as a giant papier maché sardine is paraded through the streets to the accompaniment of women dressed in mourning. With the conclusion of the burial of the sardine, a custom dating to the 18th century, which mandates that the sardine itself be set ablaze, Carnaval is drawn to a symbolic end. But, of course, the revelers will not have had enough, and so come more celebrations beginning with the Piñatas on Friday and continuing through the following Sunday when a 10 pm fireworks display finally draws a close to the year's Carnaval.

■ Villages & Things to Do in the Northeastern Peninsula

Santa Cruz de Tenerife

The capital city, numbering over 200,000 people, is no place to spend a vacation on the island of Tenerife unless the celebrations of Carnaval are under way. The overriding air of commercialism and the grimy industrial port area are rarely out of sight. Still, there are countless hotels, some casinos, a rollicking nightlife, lots of concrete. Unlike the historic capital of La Laguna nearby, which Santa Cruz gradually replaced during the 18th century, this city's architecture is predominantly modern, with some exceptions in the central district around **Plaza de España**, an area that hosts the bulk of February's Carnaval festivities. The streets and medieval accoutrements gathered around this plaza, namely the imposing city hall known as the **Cabildo de Tenerife**, the modest 16th-century **Iglesia de La Concepcíon** and the brick streets leading off from it (one of which leads to the refreshing confines of the **Parque de Garcia Sanabria**), create an endearing contrast to the rest of the city. Not that Santa Cruz lacks other attractive areas. There are tree-lined boulevards, with pots hung from balconies overflowing with bougainvillea and one stylish, leisurely water park designed by beloved Canary architect Cesar Manrique. But, with so much else to see and do on the islands, these few niceties pale in comparison.

La Laguna

Inland from Santa Cruz, the university town of San Cristobal de La Laguna is, by all outward appearances, the antithesis of its larger neighbor. With its founding in 1497, La Laguna served as the capital of Tenerife until the 18th century, when its port of Garchico was obliterated by a 15th-century volcanic eruption. Still, thanks to an ensemble of 17th- and 18th-century monuments, mansions and its respected Universidad de San Fernando, La Laguna is recognized as the island's cultural lodestar. In touring around, stick to the classic streets of **Nava Grimon**, **Herradores**, and **San Agustin de la Carrera**, each within close proximity of the next. Besides the alluring **Catedral** and the Mudéjar-influenced **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción**, both of which house religious museums, the **Iglesia de La Laguna**, **Convento de Santa Catalina** and **La Ermita de San Miguel** warrant mention.

Taganana

As it only received electricity and telephone lines around 20 years ago, the quiet village of Taganana on the far northeastern coast of Tenerife has survived relatively unscathed from the changes wrought on much of the island through increasing tourism. Along with a handful of other small villages or *caserios* and a sprinkling of overgrown caves where the native Gaunches once dwelled, Taganana lies in the realm of the moisture-rich Montes de las Mercedes, one of the few areas of the island that wasn't affected by the eruptions of Teide. In Taganana one drinks the locally made rose wine and drinks in the rugged coastal vistas of the ocean, here pierced intermittently by giant volcanic rocks. Fishing has long been the lifeblood of Taganana. If for nothing else, you should stop here to sample the fine white fish called *la vieja*.

Beaches & Surf of Northeastern Tenerife

A few kilometers north along the coast from Santa Cruz near the fishing village of San Andres is **Playa de Las Teresitas**, a wide, sandy, if somewhat sterile beach created from Saharan sand back in the 1970s. With a heavy stone breakwater meant to keep the sand from washing away, Las Teresitas lacks waves but is a good, casual floatation spot perfect for small children.

By far the most visually impressive beaches are those in the vicinity of Taganana, namely the **Playa del Roque** and the few smaller ones surrounding it. Roque, with the fine black volcanic sand native to the island and giant boulders strewn out in the surf, sees fewer tourists, has long enticed local surfers and is absolutely picturesque. Surfers might also try the waters off the **Punta del Hidalgo** and **Bajamar**.

Where to Stay

In Santa Cruz de Tenerife, ☆☆**Hotel Pelinor** *(C/ Bathencourt Alfonso 8, ☎ 92 224 68 75)* is a modest place in the city center where the action is. Doubles with private bath, air conditioning and television vary from 40 to 70€. Outside of the city center, another classic abode is the ☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Mencey** *(C/ Doctor Jose Naveiras 38, ☎ 92 260 99 00; d: 200€)*. Its colonial façade as well as its interiors have been recently restored to their former early 20th-century splendor. Rooms are elegantly furnished, each with private bath, mini bar, air conditioning and television. The leafy central courtyard and casino are a bonus. The price of a double room includes the breakfast buffet. In La Laguna, **Hotel Aguere** *(C/ Obispo Rey Redondo 57, ☎ 92 225 94 90, d 30-40€)* occupies a historic 19th-century mansion. But the years have taken their toll on the place. Still, rooms have private bath and a feel that fresh coats of paint and new carpet can't recapture.

Camping

See Mt. Teide, page 623.

What to Eat & Where

For an inexpensive sampling of the native island cuisine in Santa Cruz, try **Madrid II** *(C/ Franchy y Roca 52)*. Besides a wide array of cheap seafood *raciones*, Madrid II offers a *menu del día* with local staples for around 10€. In Taganana, **Casa Africa** *(C/ Roque de las Bodegas 3, ☎ 92 213 33 03)* has a

good vibe and delicious fried fish dishes, straight off the boats. Expect to see eye balls, tentacles and the like. Try the *papas Arrugás* with *mojo verde.*

■ Villages & Things to Do in Northern Tenerife

Puerto de la Cruz: In walking around Puerto de la Cruz, it seems like a jumbled mess of vacant hotels and cheap eateries flapping with plastic patio windows. Concrete too often interrupts the sand and there are rows of lifeless, shuttered apartments. But there are good memories as well. There is the tawny man with dreadlocks creating a delicate sand sculpture of Poseidon the sea god from the sand of the Playa Jardín; the waves crashing up against the sea wall near El Castillo de San Felipe; the unique series of seawater pools designed by Canary architect César Manrique; the carnivalesque Plaza del Charco; the green hills rising up behind Puerto de la Cruz with Mt. Teide beckoning just beyond. Puerto de la Cruz enjoys an incomparable setting, even if its manmade parts are a little overdone. It is the second-largest town in Tenerife, the first real tourist resort to develop on the island, but its personality is far more hospitable than Santa Cruz, with a laid-back air and a laissez-faire approach to the good island life.

Garachico: Following a 1706 volcanic eruption that, in a wash of lava, mostly buried what had been Tenerife's most prosperous port town, Garachico settled into a less vital role on the island. The village, which rides a bed of lava rock nudging out into the ocean, has pleasant, bougainvillea-colored plazas, cobblestone streets lined by old fishing cottages and palaces of vibrant, ornate design, as well as two monuments: the 16th-century **Castillo de San Miguel** and the **Iglesia de Santa Ana**. Don't miss the curious natural pools of **El Caleton**, formed in the bay after the 18th-century lava flow had coalesced.

Icod de los Vinos: Since the Middle Ages, Icod de los Vinos has been respected as the island's only wine-producing region, owing to its moist and comparatively cool climate. Its hearty Malvasía wines come from grapes matured in rich volcanic soils – the small, privately owned vineyards of which are seen throughout this area.

Icod de los Vinos is also the site of the island's oldest, and certainly most awesome drago tree *(dracaena draco)*, a rare and choosy species that looks like a giant bouquet of green flowers clutched in a fist. It can, in the right conditions, live thousands of years. The species was historically used for its medicinal qualities and, when more prevalent centuries ago, its sap was commonly used to make candle wax. With the death of neighboring La Orotava's older drago tree during a 19th-century hurricane, the **Drago Milenario** in Icod de los Vinos became the island's oldest surviving specimen, by some estimates 2,000 years old and still growing. The tree commands attention (and an admission fee) from its small plaza at the heart of this mostly 16th-century village, near the lovely **Plaza de la Pila** and the **Iglesia de San Marcos**.

La Orotava: On the winding road from Puerto de la Cruz to Las Cañadas del Teide, the flowery village of La Orotava can't be missed. From it a panoramic view includes the surrounding Valle de La Orotava, full of banana plantations, the outer fringes of the rustic Teide national park, and the ocean, before Puerto de la Cruz merge in one panoramic visual. If you happen to be on the island during the first weeks of June, the splendorous, centu-

ries-old streets of Oratava will be covered in fragrant tapestries of flowers lain in volcanic ash to celebrate the local festival of Octava del Corpus.

Beaches & Surf: The beaches of Puerto de la Cruz include **Playa Jardin** and **Martianez**, both naturally formed of dark volcanic sand. While typically crowded during the high season, they are no match for the crowds on the sunnier southern beaches Los Christianos and Las Americas. Surfers do occasionally venture out into the break, but serious ones swing around to the northeastern or southern coasts.

Parque Nacional del Cañadas del Teide: From Puerto de la Cruz on Tenerife's northern coast, the road winds upward towards the netherworld of Mt. Teide National Park, passing first through banana trees and past the pretty village of La Orotava, with its flower-strewn balconies. Around 2000 m (6,500 feet) above sea level the road enters a thick forest of endemic Canary pines before emerging into one of nature's more bizarre scenes – the fantastical red and grey rock formations of **Las Cañadas**. An immense volcanic depression, Las Cañadas evolved when the stacked highlands formed by repeated eruptions of the Mt. Teide volcano (which began over half a million years ago) began to collapse under their own weight. Subsequent erosion has created a landscape that resembles Mars in color, sculpture and barrenness to surround the cloud-shrouded and, for much of the year, snow-capped cone of **Mt. Teide**. At 3,718 m (12,195 feet), it is Spain's highest point, the third-biggest volcano in the world (behind Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea). It's as alluring to hikers and climbers – who should prepare for the nose-tingling emissions of sulfur at the top – as to naturalists (see *Adventures on Foot*, page 618).

The most visited of Spain's national parks, Teide can become crowded around the cable-car area during the high season, but, with such a large area, solitary spots aren't all that hard to find. Access to the park is free, but tours, which should be arranged in advance, do cost money.

With a car, the park is accessible via the 821 from Puerto de la Cruz in the north or from Granadilla de Abona in the south. Buses run regularly to the park from these towns. The **Oficina del Parque Nacional** is inconveniently located in Santa Cruz *(C/ Emilio Calzadilla 5, ☎ 92 229 01 29, fax 92 224 47 88, open Mon.-Fri. 9 am-2 pm)*, though there is a smaller Centro de Visitantes in El Portillo, which organizes guided tours; if it is closed, maps can occasionally be had at the cable-car station or the *parador* hotel nearby.

To make the hike to the edge of the crater, you'll need to pick up a pass for a set date from the park office in Santa Cruz, and don't forget to bring a photocopy of a picture ID or passport. For an overnight rest midway up the hike, contact the **Refugio de Alta Vista** *(☎ 92 223 98 11, 92 223 95 92)* to book in advance. The refuge has basic facilities including showers, bunk beds and a kitchen. It is open in the summer and only allows stays of one night. Most visitors prefer to catch the ***teléferico*** *(Estación del Teléferico, ☎ 92 269 40 38, adults 20€, kids 10€)*, or cable car at the station just down the road from the *parador*; it rises to a stop at La Rambleta a few hundred meters short of the crater in around 10 minutes and runs daily from 9 am to 5 pm, weather permitting. Don't forget to bring a jacket, even during the summer months, as the wind can get mighty chilly near the top.

Where to Stay

One of the finest hotels in Puerto de la Cruz, **Hotel Botanico** *(C/ Richard J. Yeoward 1, ☎ 92 238 14 00, www.hotelbotanico.com)* is, as its name suggests, shrouded in greenery. The well-appointed rooms have beautiful ocean views and the hotel restaurant has garnered more than a few awards through the years.

To stay within the national park of Mt. Teide, the only option is the **Parador Cañadas del Teide** *(signs can't be missed on the road to Mt. Teide; ☎ 92 238 64 15, d 110€).* While it's not as historically significant as many of the other government-run *paradors*, none of those can equal the surreal views you'll wake up to each morning. And, as is always the case with the *paradors*, the décor is tasteful, rooms are more than sufficiently appointed, and the service and food is top-notch – typical of the local culture.

Camping

Nauta *(Cañada Blanca-Las Galletas, ☎ 92 278 51 18, adults 3.61€)* outside the village of Arona in the environs of Mt. Teide is the only dependable campsite on the island, open year-round. There are more than enough amenities on hand (showers, restaurant, grocery store) to get you prepared for a hike up the mountain, or to keep you comfortable if you just plan on staying awhile.

What to Eat & Where

Outside of the terrific local cuisine served at the restaurant of the **Parador Cañadas del Teide**, **La Parilla in Puerto de la Cruz** *(Avda Richard J. Yeoward 1, ☎ 92 238 1400)* offers exceptional quality local recipes and a considerable wine list with, of course, the locals for house wines. Also in Puerto de la Cruz, **La Papaya** *(C/ Lomo 10, ☎ 92 238 28 11)* occupies a historical building dating to the 18th century. A nice terrace surrounded by manicured gardens adds to the attractions. Affordable Canary dishes are the specialty and the seafood skewers are a good choice.

■ Villages & Resorts of Southern Tenerife

Granadilla de Abona: Little mention is made of Granadilla de Abona among travelers, though many pass through it when approaching Mt. Teide from the southern coast. Like those around it, the rural village is built predominantly of volcanic stone highlighted by the brightly colored whitewashed walls of its houses, each typically accented by balconies hewn from local Canary cedar and pine. The focal point of Granadilla de Abona is its stern **Iglesia de San Antonio de Padua**. Each June locals adorn the streets around it with vibrant streamers and flower tapestries in celebration of the **Fiesta de San Antonio**, one of the few actual happenings in this otherwise clean and reserved place.

Beaches & Other Attractions: The action area of Tenerife is its southwestern coast, where manmade beaches and endless sunshine have ushered in hundreds of resort complexes and the corresponding infrastructure to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of travelers visiting here each year. Instead of local character, native charm or cultural intimacy, one gets streets

lined with discos and competing restaurants and numerous man-made beaches buried under a sea of tanning bodies.

Playa de las Americas is the central hub of Tenerife's heady coastal tourism complex, with plenty of beaches and touristy things to do day and night. Adjoining it to the south is the resort area of **Los Christianos**, whose beach spans the curve of a calm bay. Farther east the **Playa del Medano** (see *Adventures on Water*, page 617) has its share of hotels, restaurants and pubs, but seems to attract a slightly younger, hipper crowd.

The crowds thin out considerably as you head northward up the coast from Playa de las Americas. A popular attraction along this way is the **Barranco del Infierno** (Devil's Gorge), a lush gorge running from a naturally terraced waterfall outside the village of Adeje. A hiking trail from this village cuts through the ravine to culminate at the waterfall. Farther north, the resort of **Los Gigantes** enjoys an admirable setting of sheer cliffs that drop some 600 m (2,000 feet) to the ocean and a natural, volcanic sand beach.

Where to Stay

☆☆☆☆ **Hotel Reverón Plaza** *(C/ General Franco 26, ☎ 92 275 30 30, d 85-130€)* is one of the many resort hotels along the southern coast of Tenerife. This particular one is on the bay of Los Christianos, offering four-star amenities and competitive prices.

La Isla de Gran Canaria

To sample a little that each of the Canary Islands has to offer in the way of climate, landscape and culture, Gran Canaria is perhaps the best choice. The southernmost and most populous of the islands, Gran Canaria contains within its roughly circular framework of 1,532 square km (597 square miles) patches of semi-desert like the larger ones found on Fuerteventura just to the east, the lovely green swaths that dominate the island of San Miguel de La Palma to the north, the volcanic highlands, forested areas and the dry, sunny southern belt characteristic of each of the four other western islands. It's entertainment circuit is only rivaled by that of Tenerife.

The name Gran Canaria came about as a result of packs of wild dogs or "cans" that explorers encountered after docking at what became the capital city of Las Palmas, a crucial port of exploration originally founded by order of Isabella la Catolica in 1478.

From the coasts, the island rises like a cone toward the peak of Nieves (1,949 m/6,393 feet), situated at roughly the center of the island. The arid east is separated from the more humid west with a multitude of microclimates benefiting from the rain trapped in the clouds that are trapped in turn by the mountain summits.

With more than half of the island's 715,000 inhabitants crowded into Las Palmas, the desire to escape soon after disembarking one of the ferries or airplanes is a knee-jerk response. The historic Vegueta Barrio of Las Palmas preserves its streets and buildings of traditional Canary construction and an assortment of monuments (many dedicated to Columbus' exploits). That can

occupy a few hours. More rewarding are a few days spent on the southern beaches or hiking in the moist highlands, exploring rural villages like Santa Lucía or trying strange cross-sports like sea parachuting.

■ Tourism Information

Besides a tourism kiosk at the airport, a larger office is in Las Palmas at #*17 Calle León y Castillo,* ☎ *92 836 22 22*. Other information points are in the Parque Santa Catalina *(*☎ *92 826 46 23)* and the Plaza de Santa Ana *(Casas Consistoriales,* ☎ *92 833 90 45)*. In the town of Telde, try the office at #*2 Calle León y Castillo,* ☎ *92 868 13 36*.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: The **Aeropuerto de Gran Canaria** *(Telde,* ☎ *92 857 90 00, www.aena.es)* is near Telde, around 20 km (12½ miles) south of Las Palma via the main GC-1 highway. As an international airport, it handles daily flights from mainland Spain and many other destinations. Frequent smaller flights connect Gran Canaria with the surrounding Canary Islands. Along with taxis, buses run every hour between the airport and both Las Palmas and Playa del Inglés.

> **Note:** On our last visit we found the airport bus stop inconveniently located a 10-minute walk down the road from the airport.

By Sea: Though prone to change, **Transmeditteranea** *(*☎ *90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)* ferries generally connect Las Palmas to:

- Cádiz (Sat.)
- Lanzarote (Tues., Thurs. & Sat.)
- Fuerteventura (daily)
- La Palma (Thurs.)
- Tenerife (daily)

Seats on these ferries go fast, particularly during the off-season. If possible, book in advance either over the Internet, by phone, or in person at one of the port offices,

By Bus: The island's main bus terminal is in Las Palmas *(Parque de San Telmo,* ☎ *92 844 64 99, www.guaguas.com)*. Two bus companies run public services on the island. **UTINSA** covers the northern and interior regions, while **SALCAI** serves the southern region. Timetables and routes are conveniently posted at each bus stop, and passes can be purchased upon boarding or, in some cases, ahead of time at the main terminal.

By Car: The best way to cruise around Gran Canaria, rental cars are available from numerous agencies who generally offer outstanding fares. While it is wise to book in advance, it shouldn't be a problem to rent on the spot; expect lines if you try to do so at the airport – better to wait until you're in the city. All of the major rental car companies are represented on the islands (for contact information see page 66). There are a number of local companies as well, including:

- Autos Imperial *(Avda Italia 16,* ☎ *92 876 11 11)*
- Agencia Guanche *(C/ Bravo Murillo 13,* ☎ *92 836 88 77)*
- Autos Leila *(C/ Barcelona 7,* ☎ *92 824 44 42)*

- Autos Omega S.L. *(C/ Osorio 11, ☎ 92 846 25 03)*
- Betacar *(C/ Tomás Miller 53, ☎ 92 826 36 97)*

Adventures on Water

While the trade winds boost the popularity of flying sports and windsurfing, Gran Canaria is also known for its deep sea **fishing** and, to a lesser extent, its scuba diving.

In Puerto Rico, the charter company **Blue Marlin 3** *(☎ 60 762 62 37)* guides the big fish expeditions in search of shark, sailfish and tuna. Sign up for one of the morning's 50€ fishing trips and the company bus will pick you up at any of the following locations to take you to the boat: Playa del Ingles, Bahía Feliz, Maspalomas and San Agustin.

Scuba diving companies are found in all the major tourist centers. On the Playa del Ingles, check with the **Sun Sub School** *(☎ 92 877 81 65)*, in Puerto Rico the **Top Diving Shop** *(Puerto Escala, ☎ 60 602 61 71)*, or in Las Palmas **Buceo Canarias** (C/ Bernardo de la Torre, ☎ *92 826 27 86)*. Trips cost, on average, 25€ per single dive, which includes equipment. Besides barracuda, you may occasionally see a shark.

The **windsurfing** conditions are usually most favorable off **San Agustín beach** and the smaller beaches of **Las Burras** and **El Inglés** next to it. Expert windsurfers can try **Pozo Izquierdo** and nearby **Tarajililllo**, both of which have hosted past world championship competitions. Boards and instruction can be picked up at any of a number of shops on the beaches of Maspalomas, Puerto Rico, Las Cantreras and Inglés.

Adventures in the Air

With its strong trade winds, **paragliding** and the more unusual sport of **parachuting into the sea** are increasingly popular on the island. The **Aeroclub de Gran Canaria** *(Ctra General del Sur, Km 46.5, ☎ 92 876 24 47)* is the best place to learn about the options. While other multi-adventure companies offer similar activities, I for one would stick with those that are focused on flying. In Las Palmas the **Paraclub de Gran Canaria** *(C/ León y Castillo 244, $$, 92 876 24 47)* is similarly experienced. The parachuting trips should cost around 150€ each.

■ Las Palmas

History

The most populous city of the Canary Islands, Las Palmas was founded in 1478 after a Spanish squadron under the command of Juan Rejón had established its military base at the site along a strand of palm trees. This area came to be known as the Vegueta district which, along with the Triana district and Plaza de Santa Ana, formed the early commercial, governmental and residential zones of the city. In the intervening years Las Palmas prospered as a link in the sugar trade with the Americas, and as a result, attracted scores of pirates and other devious seafarers, hastening the construction of the Castilla de La Luz near the port. While Sir Francis Drake and his English fleet were repelled in their attempt to take Las Palmas in 1595, a few years later a Dutch fleet effectively ransacked the city; although a pivotal moment in and of itself, the burning of Las

Palmas was just one in a series of changes that led to the city's gradual decline through the 18th century. Then in the late 19th century the city experienced a rebirth once its Puerto de La Luz had been constructed, allowing the city to capitalize on the profitable Atlantic trade routes.

The predominance of Modernista-styled architecture throughout the city – and particularly the developed areas around the port – dates to this period. Like the rest of Spain's sunniest coastal areas, Las Palmas experienced a tourist boom during the 1950s and '60s, led initially by the Swedish, which resulted in the often bawdy and somewhat over-the-top resort digs of Las Canteras beach, Las Palmas' sand box.

Along with the neighboring Triana district, the historic heart of Las Palmas is the Vegueta district, an evocative area exhibiting exceptional Latin Colonial architecture dating to the 15th century.

> **TIP:** If Canary architecture interests you, visit the Pueblo Canario, a faux-neighborhood designed by Canarian artist Nestor Martin-Fernandez de la Torre to exhibit the various styles found on the islands in one location. It is north of the Triana and Vegueta districts in the parks of the Ciudad Jardín, also the site of the city's casino.

Las Palmas Today

As in the past, the **Vegueta** and **Triana** areas continue to serve as the cultural nexus of Gran Canaria. It is said that, prior to his voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus stopped in the **Casa de Colón** *(C/ Colón 1, ☎ 92 831 23 84, open Mon.-Fri. 9 am-7 pm, Sat. 9 am-3 pm)* to request aid of the governor in modifying his fleet. With its exhibits of charts, maps, journals and other maritime affects, this 15th-century former governor's mansion and museum paints a picture of the Americas before and after Columbus' fated voyage and how that all ties in to the Canary Islands.

The **Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno** *(C/ Los Balcones, open Tues.-Sat. 10 am-9 pm, Sun. 10 am-2 pm)* was founded with the acquisition of a large collection of '40s and '50s Canary artwork from the Luján Pérez School. Las Palmas' modern art museum has evolved to include pieces by the latest generation of Canary artists, work by architect César Manrique and a significant representation of African and Latin contemporary art.

From here, the beloved **Calle de los Balcones** leads to the Plaza de Santa Ana, site of the city's *Ayuntamiento*, constructed in the Modernist style that came into fashion in Las Palmas during the 19th century. Adjoining it is the city's **Catedral de Santa Ana** *(Plaza de Santa Ana, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-1:30 pm & 4 pm-6:30 pm, ☎ 92 831 49 89)*, begun soon after the discovery of the Americas and finished centuries later in Neoclassical style.

Adjoining the lovely Plaza del Espiritu is **El Museo Canario** *(C/ Dr. Verneau 2, ☎ 92 831 56 00, open Mon.-Fri. 10 am-8 pm, Sat. and Sun. 10 am-2 pm)*, a most extensive exhibition of the aboriginal peoples known as Guanche, who inhabited the island from as early as 500 BC until the era of Columbus. A trove of archeological relics are included in displays on the Guanches' nature-worshiping faith, their mummification techniques and use of ceramics.

Beaches

The main beach of Las Palmas is **Playa de Las Canteras**, a three-kilometer (1.9-mile) expanse of golden sand tracing the western coastline of the city. **La Barra de Las Canteras**, a natural reef formed by past lava flows, runs parallel to Las Canteras a few hundred meters (600 feet) out in the ocean, thus preventing heavy waves from washing up on the beach. This bay-like setting, though often crowded, is preferable to the neighboring **Playa de Alcaravaneras**, which, due to its proximity to the port, is known to be polluted.

Entertainment

Two areas in Las Palmas are tops for **shopping**. Throughout the **Triana** district traditional shops intermingle with tourist traps selling Indian curios and the like. Along the **Avenida Mesa y Lopéz** are more upscale department stores and the Corte Inglés shopping mall.

Nightlife, particularly during the good-weather season, is centered around the pubs, *chiringuitos* and discos of **Playa de Las Canteras**. For inexpensive drinks stop in at the traditional dive **Bodegón Pachichi** *(C/ Los Martínez de Escobar 51)*. **Cuasquías** *(C/ San Pedro 2, open 10:30-2:30 pm)* has live music each night.

Where to Stay & Eat

In Las Palmas, **Hotel Madrid** *(Plaza Cairasco 4, ☎ 92 836 06 64)* is somewhat of a city landmark in the old Triana district. Slightly more upscale than a nice hostel, Hotel Madrid's rooms with private bath and television are a bargain at 30€ per night. Throughout the year its terrace is a locus of activity. There is no shortage of restaurants on the Playa Cantreras of Las Palmas. **La Marinera** *(C/ Alonso Ojeda, ☎ 92 846 15 55)* is a moderately priced seafood house along the way. Seafood dishes range from 10-25€ at night and most of the tables have a good view of the ocean.

■ Villages & Sights in the North

The northern realm of Gran Canaria benefits from the brunt of the rain clouds that drift over the island. In contrast to the south, this area is rich with vegetation, slightly cooler and often drizzly.

Arucas

Long the most prosperous agricultural center of Gran Canaria, Arucas is slowly settling into a new role as another Gran Canaria tourist center (plans are afoot to develop the coast around Arucas into a combination health spa, waterpark and leisure area). Until recently, before banana cultivation took over, the cash crop of Arucas was sugar cane, which locals used, among other things, to make rum. Samples and bottles of the stuff can still be had at everyone's favorite destination, the **Fabrica de Ron** (rum factory). The **Plaza de la Constitución**, at the heart of historical Arucas, is typical of the 16th-century architecture characterizing the village. From atop the **Volcán de Arucas** that towers above the village, the whitewashed buildings below form a startling contrast to the dark Neo-Gothic spires and volcanic rock con-

struction of the **Iglesia de San Juan**, which was built during the last few decades.

Gáldar

With a smattering of wind-generating turbines lining the worn slopes of the Pico de Galdar at its back and a rocky coastline set out before it, the unassuming architecture of Gáldar seems at odds with its surroundings. Gáldar was once the capital of the indigenous islanders known as Guanches, who existed on these islands for an astonishing 2,000 years until the New World explorers saw to their eradication. Gáldar's **Cueva Pintada** is among the most fascinating archeological sites associated with the Guanches and still preserves some of their rock paintings. Outside of Gáldar, the **Guancha Necropolis** and **El Agujero** are two other sites where the Guanche culture can be appreciated by tourists.

In the village, the **Iglesia de Santiago de Los Caballeros** dates to the earliest period of Spain's dominion in Gran Canaria. It is one of the few early locations to have survived on the island which the Spaniards used in converting the Guanches to Catholicism.

Beaches

The small **Playa de las Nieves** is west of Gáldar just outside of Agaete. The name, which means beach of the snow, is a little misleading as it would have been more aptly named for the heavy wind in the area.

Where to Stay & Eat

The **Hacienda Buen Suceso** *(Ctra Arucas-Bañaderos Km 1, ☎ 92 862 29 45, d 100-130€)* is a 16th-century country manor combined with a cozy hotel. Situated on a working banana plantation, the setting and the antique-furnished rooms make it a worthy stopping point for the night. The hotel has a restaurant serving traditional Canary cuisine.

■ Villages, Resorts & Sights Interior & South

Telde: Gran Canarias' second largest town, Telde preserves some of the earliest examples of Spanish island architecture. The 15th-century **Iglesia de San Juan** is the centerpiece of the historical San Juan district that, along with the San Francisco district, looks much the way it would have looked back in the Middle Ages, shortly after Telde had lost its privilege as one of the pre-Hispanic capitals of Gran Canaria.

Fataga & Arteara: Off the beaten path, the neighboring villages of Fataga and Arteara people the rim of the Faraga gorge running through Gran Canaria's interior volcanic highlands. They are, to put it simply, the polar opposites of the coastal tourist resorts just under 30 km (18.7 miles) to the south. Surrounded by strands of swaying palm trees and the layered silhouettes of green hills, each becoming more faint in the distance, Fataga and Arteara make perfect bases for hikes into the dense surroundings, which could include a visit to the nearby remains of the Guanche Necropolis a short distance south of Areteara.

Beaches & Resorts: From east to west along the southern coast, the beach areas of **San Agustín**, **Inglés** and **Maspalomas** adjoin to form the heaviest

tourism points on the island. It is hard to say which is more developed, though the Playa del Inglés is perhaps the name most immediately recognizable to sun-seeking visitors. For the company of thousands of potential new friends, the endless, palm-shaded beaches and a purely fun escape with plenty of opportunities to flaunt your nocturnal nature, this is the one area to experience in Gran Canaria.

With beach after beach both east and west of Gran Canaria's southernmost Punta de Maspalomas, finding a less exuberant spot for the afternoon is not beyond the realm of expectation. The best chance is to head west where, once the coastal GC-1 Autovía ends eight km (4.8 miles) outside of Maspalomas, the smaller 811 begins and the tourism presence becomes, if only slightly, less intense. After passing the resorts of Puerto Rico and then Morgán, the road veers inland. From this point, a hike or bike can get you to the lonely beaches of the west coast, including **Playa de Veneguera**, **Ambar**, **Aneas** and **Asno**.

Where to Stay

In Tejeda, a 20-minute drive from the village of Fataga, the historic **Parador Hostería Cruz de Tejeda** *(☎ 92 866 60 50, d 120€)* offers fine accommodations and its restaurant serves traditional island fare. On the coast the accommodation possibilities are endless. On Playa de Inglés, **Hotel IFA Dunamar** *(C/ Helsinki 8, ☎ 92 877 28 00, d 150€)* has modern rooms with terrific views of the coastal sand dunes. A cheaper option, not on the beach, but within a two-minute walk, is **Hotel Neptuno** *(Avda Alféreces Provisionales 29, ☎ 92 877 74 92, d 75-100€)*, a relatively modern place with adequate furnishings and standard amenities.

Camping

The only campsite on the island is in Mogán on the Playa Tauro. **Camping Guantánamo** *(☎ 92 856 02 07, adults 2.12€)* has basic facilities such as showers and restrooms and a small store.

La Isla de Fuerteventura

It is said that Fuerteventura, just south of Lanzarote in the southwestern wash of the archipelago, has the best of the Canary beaches. Most of these long, amber stretches remain pristine, free of people and their developments, with a vibrant ring of emerald water washing over the shallow coastal shelf that characterizes Fuerteventura's coastlines. Like neighboring and geologically similar Lanzarote, Fuerteventura's islanders, who are concentrated in the capital city of Puerto del Rosario and south from there to the ridge of the southern Jandía Peninsula, enjoy near-constant sunshine but are made to endure arid conditions blown in from the Sahara. As one of the two geologically oldest islands, with its scant rainfall and erosion-prone terrain, Fuerteventura is a naturally evolving sculpture dominated by deserts, modest, rounded hills and sand dunes reminiscent of Morroco's coast and desert regions a little over 100 km (62 miles) to the east.

■ Tourist Information

In Puerto del Rosario, tourism offices are in the airport *(☎ 92 886 62 35)*, at Avda Primero de Mayo 37 *(☎ 92 885 10 24)* and at Avda de la Constitución 5 *(☎ 92 853 08 44)*.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: The **Aeropuerto de Fuerteventura** is a few kilometers south of Puerto del Rosario via the SC-630. Besides the taxis, buses run hourly to Puerto del Rosario between 7:45 am and 8:45 pm.

By Sea: Ferries run by **Transmediterranea** *(☎ 90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)* dock in the port of Puerto del Rosario (Lanzarote and Gran Canaria destinations) and the southern port of Morro Jable (Gran Canaria and Tenerife destinations).

Fred Olsen *(☎ 92 262 82 32, www.reservas.fredolsen.es)* and **Naviera Armas** *(☎ 902 456 500, www.navieraarmas.com)* also offer regular connections to the larger surrounding islands.

By Bus: The public bus system works well if traveling from Puerto del Rosario to Corralejo, Caleta de Fuste or Morro Jable, each of which is generally connected every 30 minutes from 7 am to around 8 pm. Stopping at or starting from lesser destinations along the way is possible.

By Car: The major rental car agencies are represented at the airport and in the capital of Puerto del Rosario. Additionally, the usually cheaper and generally reliable **BetaCar** company *(airport, ☎ 92 886 07 59)* has offices at the airport, as well as in Corralejo in the north and Bahía Calma and Jandía in the south.

■ Adventures on Water

Not surprisingly, **windsurfing** and **kiteboarding** are big business for those who come to Fuerteventura to escape the crowds of Gran Canaria and Tenerife. Most head to the **Jandía beach**, site of a regular world championship competition. The **Flag Beach Windsurf Center** *(C/ General Linares 31, ☎ 92 853 55 39)* can fill you in on the conditions and set you up with a sail. A learner's course costs 120€; for kiteboarding, it is 180€. A weekend windsurf set-up should cost around 150€.

■ Adventures on Land

A unique experience can be had on a camel safari in the desert landscape of Fuerteventura. You can't miss the flyers for this popular activity – they're in those tourist kiosks everywhere. In the village of Lajares, the company **Camel Safari** *(Ctra Majanicho, ☎ 92 886 80 06)* guides short rides and longer two-hour rides that cost 15€ per person.

■ Villages & Sights to Visit

Puerto del Rosario: The capital of Fuerteventura is relatively unexceptional architecturally or otherwise and, save for its role as a commercial and port city, of little interest to most visitors. Should you wish to go shopping,

though, Puerto del Rosario is certainly most accommodating. The buildings and streets of Puerto del Rosario date mostly from 1835 onward, the year in which it was established as the island's capital. The oldest area of town, which has numerous terrace bars and restaurants, is around the street of Primo de Mayo and the Plaza de la Paz.

Betancuría: Local islanders tend to agree that Betancuría, in the crux of low mountains near Fuerteventura's west coast, is the loveliest village on the island. It is also one of the earliest areas of settlement. In the local **Museo de Betancuría**, archeological and ethnological exhibitions are dedicated to the native Guanches who established one of their earliest communities in the area. Nearly a thousand years later, work on the village's **Catedral de Santa María** was begun soon after the village had been founded in the early 15th century. Originally fashioned in a Gothic-Norman style, little more than the bell tower survives in the rehabilitated 17th-century catedral. The Norman influence is also evident in the name Betancuría, taken from the French colonizer Jean de Bethencourt who, finding no success in conquering the neighboring islands of Tenerife and Gran Canaria, instead focused his attention on the two nearby islands. After conquering Lanzarote, Bethencourt's troops began to make incursions into Fuerteventura, where they eventually established Betancuría as the early capital.

La Oliva: A short drive northwest of Puerto del Rosario, the small town of La Oliva was once the mighty military center of the island. Its most beloved monument, the fanciful **Casa de los Coroneles**, survives as a testament to this privileged period when the top military officials made it their residence and ruled the island through a system of regional parishes tantamount to a feudal system. Other sites in La Oliva include the **Parroquía de Nuestra Señora de Candelaría**, and the **Museo La Cilla Centro de Arte Canario Casa Mane**, which houses a number of works of contemporary Canary artists including pieces by the well-respected native islander Alberto Manrique.

Corralejo & El Cotillo: On Fuerteventura's northern coast, two small communities are known for their fishermen and fish dishes. Corralejo, the larger of the two but still quite small, is also a marginally flourishing port that welcomes pleasure boats from afar and ferries from Lanzarote on a regular basis. Besides eating, scuba diving has become a big business in the area and plenty of dive shops are around to accommodate. The nearby Playas de Corralejo are noted for their exceptional quality and emptiness. Tourism development has yet to greatly affect Fuerteventura's northern coast.

Fuerteventura Beaches: The peaceful, dune-strewn **Playas de Corralejo**, known locally as the Playas Grandes, are just outside of Corralejo on the northern coast. Going down south, the beaches pick up tourists; of these, the **Playa Sotavento de Jandía** on the eastern side of the southern peninsula is the most heavily visited and has, as a result, the widest range of restaurants and accommodations. This trend continues to the southern tip of the island at **Morro del Jable**, whose beach wraps a small bay. On the far side of the peninsula, though, the **Playa de Barlovento de Jandía** is relatively unbothered by foreigners, in part because it isn't as easily accessed and, moreover, because its waters can be treacherous on days of strong tide.

Where to Stay & Eat

In Puerto del Rosario, the **Hotel Fuerteventura Playa Blanca** *(Playa Blanca 45, ☎ 92 885 11 50, d 65-115€)* enjoys a status as one of Spain's great government-run *paradors*. Located just outside the city on the beach, the immaculately furnished rooms have views of the ocean and all the good amenities, plus tennis courts, a pool and billiard hall. The hotel also has one of the city's best restaurants, which serves typical dishes like goat stew, *papas arrugadas* (a dish of new potatoes boiled in seawater, then baked and served with one of two spicy mojo sauces) and various seafood platters. A cheaper alternative in Puerto del Rosario is the **Pensión Rubén Tinguaro** *(C/ Juan XXIII 48, ☎ 92 885 10 88, d 35€)*, which offers basic rooms with television and, when possible, private bath.

La Isla de Lanzarote

These are the badlands of the Canary Islands, with scenery mostly devoid of greenery, a ceaseless, often irritating wind, volcanic cones and dark, often uninhabitable expanses that form a startling contrast to the many pale, sandy beaches. While intriguing to keen volcanologists, the conditions of Lanzarote mostly dissuade the average tourist from a visit, even though the sun is almost always shining. Lanzarote has a certain visual and geological appeal that is rare in the rest of the country. UNESCO has declared the whole island a Biosphere Reserve, within which is the fantastically captivating Parque Nacional de Timanfaya. Unlike the other Canary Islands, Lanzarote's "look" is the product of more recent volcanic activity of the 18th and 19th century. During this period, two major eruptions set fire to the island, covering it in layer upon layer of smoldering lava that, in certain areas, continues to smoke. To subsist in this challenging setting, the islanders have developed a unique system of viticulture, as particularly seen in the northern realm of the island. Here, around the villages of La Geria and Uga, each vine is surrounded by a semicircular rock wall which acts to shield it from the strong and potentially devastating Sirrocco wind that blows in from the Sahara. These unique vineyards make for hip photographs and, moreover, for a local wine that is just fine for numbing the senses when Lanzarote begins to assail them.

■ Tourist Information

Offices are located in the two main tourism localities: Arrecife *(Parque José Ramírez Cerdá s/n, ☎ 92 881 18 60)* and Puerto del Carmen *(Avda Marítima de las Playas, ☎ 92 851 53 37)*.

■ Getting Here & Around

By Air: The **Aeropuerto de Lanzarote** *(☎ 92 881 15 52)* is five km (three miles) south of Arrecife on the autovía to Yaiza. A bus runs every 30 minutes from 8:10 am-5:40 pm between the airport and Arrecife (.90€).

By Sea: **Transmediterranea** ferries *(☎ 90 245 46 45, www.trasmediterranea.es)* run from the port of Arrecife to the surrounding islands. Both **Fred Olsen** *(☎ 92 262 82 32, www.reservas.fredolsen.es)* and

Naviera Armas ferries (☎ 902 456 500, www.navieraarmas.com) depart from the Playa Blanca.

By Bus: A bus system covers most areas of the island, run by **Lanzarote Bus** *(☎ 92 88224 58)*. Other companies cater to particular destinations: **Arrecife Bus. S.L.** *(☎ 92 881 15 22)*, **Autobuses Guacimeta** *(☎ 92 861 31 97)* and **Volcanes Bus** *(☎ 92 880 35 33)*.

By Car: Along with large international rental car agencies, the Spanish-run **BetaCar** *(airport ☎ 92 884 62 60)* has offices in the airport, Costa Teguise, Puerto del Carmen and near the Playa del Carmen.

■ Villages & Sights to Visit

The capital and main tourist resort of Lanzarote is **Arrecife**, on the south-eastern coast of the island. More than likely you'll need to pass through this unspectacular city before venturing out into the island. With a quick stop, check out the **Castillo de San Gabriel** and the **Castillo de San José**. The revered local architect Cesar Manrique was responsible for converting the 18th-century Castillo de San José into the home of the island's **Museo de Arte Contemporaneo** *(Puerto Naos, ☎ 928 81 23 21, open Mon.-Sun.)*. **Puerto del Carmen**, 10 km (six miles) south of Arrecife, is the only other major tourist center of the island.

In driving around the island, take note of the many structures designed by the late architect and island native César Manrique. On a drive to arguably the island's most attractive village, **Haría**, make a detour to reach the weird volcanic caves of the **Jameos del Agua**, flooded with sea water and retrofitted by Manrique as a concert auditorium with a restaurant, pool and disco; nearby is the **Cueva de Los Verdes**, with an entrance designed by Manrique and tour guides on hand to lead through its lit caverns. In the south of the island, the emerald waters of the **El Golfo lagoon** sided by sheer cliffs warrant a visit.

Beaches: The best beaches of Lanzarote (though they're all quite nice) are near the **Playa Blanca** at the southern tip of the island. Of these, the stark white sands of the **Punta de Papagayo** are off the beaten path and usually empty. The beaches around Puerto del Carmen and Arrecife, including **Guacimeta**, **El Reducto** and **Las Cucharas**, are more lively and only by Lanzarote standards very crowded. In the west, the **Playa de Famara** outside of Teguise is a popular picture-taking spot with tall cliffs wrapped around it.

Parque Nacional de Timanfaya: Spain's most forbidding national park is of keen interest to vulcanologists, but less so to the average tourist. The volcanic landscape is all but devoid of vegetation, smells of sulfur and has as its symbol, rather appropriately, the image of the devil. Unlike the surrounding islands, Timanfaya has experienced comparatively recent volcanic activity, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. All told there are 36 volcanoes within the park and probably the best way to see them all is on one of the tour buses operated out of Islote de Hilario, where the park center is located. The park is signposted from the village of Yaiza. Hungry tourists will appreciate the meals cooked on natural geothermal barbecues. While it encompasses the most awesome of the island's volcanoes, Timanfaya's are just a few of over 300 cones, a feature that has earned the whole of the island protection

under UNESCO. After a visit, it should come as no surprise that the island has frequently been used as a setting for science fiction movies.

■ Where to Stay & Eat

The modern ☆☆☆ **Hotel Lancelot** *(Avda Mancomunidad 9, ☎ 92 880 50 99, d 55-75€)* is on Arrecife's Playa del Reducto. Each of the rooms has a private terrace, bath and television. For the budget traveler, **Pension Cardona** *(C/ 18 de Julio11, ☎ 92 881 10 08, d 25-35€)* has simple and small rooms and, for the most part, shared baths. Request a street-front room. The chefs of **Restaurante Colón** *(Playa del Cable, C/ Cactus, ☎ 92 880 56 49)* take pride in their innovative dishes, a cross of native products and tropical tastes.

Additional Reading

Culture

Iberia, James Michener, Fawcett Books

Tales of the Alhambra, Washington Irving, Miquel Sanchez Press

A Winter in Mallorca (Ein Winter auf Mallorca), George Sand

South from Granada; The Spanish Labyrinth, Gerald Brenan, Kodansha International

A Handbook for Travelers in Spain, Richard Ford

Homage to Catalonia, George Orwell, Harvest Books

The Bible in Spain; *The Zincali*, George Borrow

Festivals and Rituals of Spain, Cristina Garcia Rodera, Harry N Abrams Press

The New Spaniards, John Hooper, Penguin USA

Morbo: The Story of Spanish Football, Phil Ball, WSC Books

Death in the Afternoon; *The Dangerous Summer*, Ernest Hemingway, Scribner Press

A Woman Unknown. Voices from a Spanish Life, Lucia Graves

Contemporary Spain: A Handbook, Christopher J. Ross, Oxford University Press

Guidebooks

Spain, An Oxford Archeological Guide, Robert Collins

The Spanish Kitchen, Nicholas Butcher, Pan Macmillan Press

Monarch Guide to the Wines of Spain, Jan Read, Simon & Shuster

To the Heart of Spain: Food and Wine Adventures Beyond the Pyrenees, Ann & Larry Walker, Berkeley Hills Press

The Foods and Wines of Spain; *An Uncommon Guide*, Penelope Casas, Knopf

The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook, David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, Griffin Trade Paperback

History

A Traveler's History of Spain, Juan Lalaguna, Interlink Pub Group

The Spanish Civil War, Hugh Thomas, Modern Library

Spain: A History, Raymond Carr, Oxford Press

Spain, The Root and the Flower, John A. Crow, University of California Press

Art

Federico Garcia Lorca, Ian Gibson, Pantheon Books

History of Spanish Architecture, Bernard Bevan

Five Plays: Comedies and Tragicomedies, Federico Garcia Lorca, Penguin

Three Major Plays, Lope de Vega, Oxford Press

Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors, Antonio Palomino, Cambridge University Press

Fiction

Spain, A Traveler's Literary Companion, edited by Peter R. Bush & Lisa Dillman, Whereabouts Press

Don Quixote, Miguel de Cervantes

Journey to the Alcarria; *The Family of Pascual Duarte*, Camilo Jose Cela, Atlantic Monthly Press

Monsignor Quixote, Graham Greene, Random House

The Sun Also Rises; *For Whom the Bells Toll*, Ernest Hemingway, Scribner Press

The Alchemist; *The Pilgrimage*, Paul Coelho, Harper Collins

Outdoors

Wildlife Traveling Companion: Spain, John Measures, The Crowood Press

Wild Spain: A Traveler's Guide, Frederic V. Grunfield, Sheldrake Press

Walks and Climbs in the Picos de Europa, Robin Walker, Cicerone Press

Through the Spanish Pyrenees: GR11 Long Distance Footpath, Paul Lucia, Cicerone Press,

Walks and Climbs in the Pyrenees, Kev Reyonds, Cicerone Press

Alpujarras: A Walking Guide, David Anthony Brawn & Rosamund Coreen Brawn, Discovery Walking Guides Ltd

Walking in Mallorca, June Parker, Cicerone Press

Walking in the Sierra Nevada, And Walmsley, Cicerone Press

Mountain Walks on the Costa Blanca, Bob Stansfield, Cicerone Press

SAS Survival Handbook, John "Lofty" Wiseman, Harper Collins

Spanish Vocabulary

■ DAYS OF THE WEEK

domingo . . . . . Sunday
lunes . . . . . Monday
martes . . . . . Tuesday
miercoles . . . . . Wednesday
jueves . . . . . Thursday
viernes . . . . . Friday
sabado . . . . . Saturday

■ MONTHS OF THE YEAR

enero . . . . . January
febrero . . . . . February
marzo . . . . . March
abril . . . . . April
mayo . . . . . May
junio . . . . . June
julio . . . . . July
agosto . . . . . August
septiembre . . . . . September
octubre . . . . . October
noviembre . . . . . November
diciembre . . . . . December

■ NUMBERS

un . . . . . one
dos . . . . . two
tres . . . . . three
cuatro . . . . . four
cinco . . . . . five
seis . . . . . six
siete . . . . . seven
ocho . . . . . eight
nueve . . . . . nine
diez . . . . . ten
once . . . . . eleven
doce . . . . . twelve
trece . . . . . thirteen
catorce . . . . . fourteen
quince . . . . . fifteen
dieciséis . . . . . sixteen
diecisiete . . . . . seventeen
dieciocho . . . . . eighteen
diecinueve . . . . . nineteen
veinte . . . . . twenty

veintiuno . . . . . twenty-one
veintidós . . . . . twenty-two
treinta . . . . . thirty
cuarenta . . . . . forty
cincuenta . . . . . fifty
sesenta . . . . . sixty
setenta . . . . . seventy
ochenta . . . . . eighty
noventa . . . . . ninety
cienone . . . . . hundred
ciento uno . . . . . one hundred one
doscientos . . . . . two hundred
quinientos . . . . . five hundred
mil . . . . . one thousand
mil uno . . . . . one thousand one
mil dos . . . . . two thousand
un millón . . . . . one million
mil millones . . . . . one billion
primero . . . . . first
segundo . . . . . second
tercero . . . . . third
cuarto . . . . . fourth
quinto . . . . . fifth
sexto . . . . . sixth
séptimo . . . . . seventh
octavo . . . . . eighth
noveno . . . . . ninth
décimo . . . . . tenth
undécimo . . . . . eleventh
duodécimo . . . . . twelfth
último . . . . . last

■ CONVERSATION

¿Como esta usted? . . . . . How are you?
¿Bien, gracias, y usted? . . . . . Well, thanks, and you?
Buenas dias . . . . . Good morning.
Buenas tardes . . . . . Good afternoon.
Buenas noches . . . . . Good evening/night.
Hasta la vista . . . . . See you again.
Hasta luego . . . . . So long.
¡Buena suerte! . . . . . Good luck!
Adios . . . . . Goodbye.
Mucho gusto de conocerle . . . . . Glad to meet you.
Felicidades . . . . . Congratulations.
Muchas felicidades . . . . . Happy birthday.
Feliz Navidad . . . . . Merry Christmas.

Feliz Año Nuevo. . . . . Happy New Year.
Gracias. . . . . Thank you.
Por favor. . . . . Please.
De nada/con mucho gusto. . . . . You're welcome.
Perdoneme. . . . . Pardon me.
¿Como se llama esto? . . . . . What do you call this?
Lo siento. . . . . I'm sorry.
Permitame. . . . . Permit me.
Quisiera... . . . . I would like...
Adelante. . . . . Come in.
Permitame presentarle... . . . . May I introduce...
¿Como se llamo usted? . . . . . What is your name?
Me llamo... . . . . My name is...
No se. . . . . I don't know.
Tengo sed. . . . . I am thirsty.
Tengo hambre. . . . . I am hungry.
Soy norteamericano/a . . . . . I am an American.
¿Donde puedo encontrar...? . . . . . Where can I find...?
¿Que es esto? . . . . . What is this?
¿Habla usted ingles? . . . . . Do you speak English?
Hablo/entiendo un poco. . . . . I speak/understand a little Spanish.
Español
Hay alguien aqui que . . . . . Is there anyone here who
hable ingles? speaks English?
Le entiendo. . . . . I understand you.
No entiendo. . . . . I don't understand.
Hable mas despacio por favor. . . . . Please speak more slowly.
Repita por favor. . . . . Please repeat.

■ TELLING TIME

¿Que hora es? . . . . . What time is it?
Son las... . . . . It is...
... cinco. . . . . five oíclock.
... ocho y diez. . . . . ten past eight.
... seis y cuarto. . . . . quarter past six.
... cinco y media. . . . . half past five.
... siete y menos cinco. . . . . five of seven.
antes de ayer. . . . . the day before yesterday.
anoche. . . . . yesterday evening.
esta mañana. . . . . this morning.
a mediodia. . . . . at noon.
en la noche. . . . . in the evening.
de noche. . . . . at night.
a medianoche. . . . . at midnight.
mañana en la mañana. . . . . tomorrow morning.
mañana en la noche. . . . . tomorrow evening.

pasado mañana. . . . . the day after tomorrow.

■ DIRECTIONS

¿En que direccion queda...? . . . . . In which direction is...?
Lleveme a... por favor. . . . . Take me to... please.
Llevame alla ... por favor. . . . . Take me there please.
¿Que lugar es este? . . . . . What place is this?
¿Donde queda el pueblo?. . . . . Where is the town?
¿Cual es el mejor camino para...? . . . Which is the best road to...?
Malécon . . . . . Road by the sea.
De vuelta a la derecha. . . . . Turn to the right.
De vuelta a la isquierda. . . . . Turn to the left.
Siga derecho.. . . . . Go this way.
En esta direccion. . . . . In this direction.
¿A que distancia estamos de...? . . . . . How far is it to...?
¿Es este el camino a...? . . . . . Is this the road to...?
Es.... . . . . Is it...
¿... cerca? . . . . near?
¿... lejos? . . . . far?
¿... norte? . . . . north?
¿... sur? . . . . south?
¿... este? . . . . east?
¿... oeste? . . . . west?
Indiqueme por favor. . . . . Please point.
Hagame favor de decirme . . . . . Please direct me to...
donde esta...
... el telefono. . . . . the telephone.
... el bano. . . . . the bathroom.
... el correo. . . . . the post office.
... el banco. . . . . the bank.
... la comisaria. . . . . the police station.

■ ACCOMMODATIONS

Estoy buscando un hotel... . . . . I am looking for a hotel that's...
... bueno. . . . . good.
... barato. . . . . cheap.
... cercano. . . . . nearby.
... limpio. . . . . clean.
¿Dónde queda un buen hotel? . . . . . Where is a good hotel?
¿Hay habitaciones libres? . . . . . Do you have available rooms?
¿Dónde están los baños/servicios? . . . . Where are the bathrooms?
Quisiera un... . . . . I would like a...
... cuarto sencillo. . . . . single room.
... cuarto con baño. . . . . room with a bath.
... cuarto doble. . . . . double room.
¿Puedo verlo? . . . . . May I see it?
¿Cuanto cuesta? . . . . . What's the cost?

¡Es demasiado caro!. . . . . It's too expensive!

■ EATING & DRINKING

Breakfast . . . . . desayuno
Lunch . . . . . almuerzo
Dinner . . . . . cena
Is there a good restaurant nearby?
. . . . . ¿Hay un buen restaurante cerca de aqui?
Enjoy the meal . . . . . comer con gusto
Waiter . . . . . camarero
Could I see the menu please? . . . . . ¿Me trae la carta, por favor?
Wine list. . . . . lista de vinos
Do you have vegetarian food?. . . . . ¿Tienes platos vegetarianos
One portion/two portions. . . . . una ración/dos raciones
A glass of . . . . . un vaso de . . .
Fork. . . . . tenedor
Spoon . . . . . cuchara
Knife . . . . . cuchillo
Pepper. . . . . pimiento
Salt . . . . . sal
Water. . . . . agua
Sugar . . . . . azucar
Bread. . . . . pan
Meat . . . . . carne
Eggs. . . . . juevos
Chicken . . . . . pollo
Orange juice . . . . . zuma de naranja
Tea . . . . . te

■ TRAVEL

Car . . . . . coche
Bus . . . . . autobus
Motorcycle . . . . . moto
Train . . . . . trén
Subway. . . . . metro
Boat. . . . . barco
Arrival . . . . . sllegadas
Departure. . . . . ssalidas
Bicycle . . . . . bicicleta
Road . . . . . camino
Highway . . . . . carretera
Interstate . . . . . autovía
Stop . . . . . alto
Driver's license. . . . . carnet de conducer
Parking lot . . . . . aparcamiento
Parking meter. . . . . parquímetro
Gasoline . . . . . gasoline

Oil . . . . . aceite
Tire . . . . . sneumaticos
Ticket . . . . . billete
How far is. . . . ? . . . . . ¿Cuantos lejos es . . . ?

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